



Thomas Jay Bellport

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TREATISE

ON

SECRET AND SOCIAL

PRAYER.

BY RICHARD TREFFRY.

"Prayers are the bulwarks of piety."—BARROW.

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PREFACE.

THE following Treatise was meditated during a protracted season of affliction. For several months the Author was confined to his house, and chiefly to his bed; and rendered incapable, through bodily weakness, of occupying his place in the pulpit, and engaging in those ministerial duties to which he had been accustomed, with little interruption, for nearly half a century. During his affliction, he felt, in an unusual degree, the importance and necessity of prayer; and he was induced, when favoured with a measure of returning health, to throw his thoughts into the form in which they are here presented to the reader.

If there is any one duty within the whole range of revelation more explicitly adverted to, more positively enjoined, more frequently practised, and to the performance of which more promises are annexed in the Scriptures than another, it is that of prayer. Prayer is a duty which commends itself to every man's conscience; a duty that admits of no substitute; and from the obligation to which there can be no exoneration. But, strange as it may seem, it is a duty which thousands, through ignorance, totally neglect; and others, through carelessness, imperfectly and irregularly perform. Even among those who admit

its propriety, and allow its necessity, many there are who postpone its performance to what they deem a more convenient opportunity. What unwillingness they evince to enter into their closet; and what reluctance to remain in it! How many excuses are framed for the total omission of this duty! Hence prayer, which is essentially connected with the present well-being, and the future and endless blessedness, of man, is impiously neglected until the approach of the last enemy; and thus, "to the mercies of a moment" are left "the vast concerns of an eternal" state.

To minister to the instruction of men in reference to the nature of prayer, and instrumentally to beget in them a love to the practice of it, is a work, the beneficial results of which can never be duly estimated. And should this little Treatise be so far sanctioned by the Head of the Church, as to augment the number of praying people; or should it induce those who do pray to be more importunate at the throne of grace for the blessings they need; the glory of God will be promoted, the sum of human happiness increased, and the end of its publication answered.

London, April 27th, 1841.

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A TREATISE

ON

SECRET AND SOCIAL PRAYER.

CHAPTER I.

A DEFINITION OF PRAYER.

GOD is the only self-sufficient Being in the universe. His existence is unoriginated, and therefore necessary and eternal. He is emphatically styled, by St. Paul, the "blessed," or happy, "God." He is ineffably and inconceivably happy in the enjoyment of himself. His happiness is all his own; and it is so absolutely perfect, as to preclude the possibility of increase; and so immutable, as to be without variableness or shadow of turning. This is a universally acknowledged truth: even heathen authors, in order to find out what properties to attribute to God, pictured in their imaginations all such qualities as they conceived essential to happiness, and rejected all others. Whatever differences of opinion there were among them concerning the perfections of the Divine Being, in this they were all agreed, that blessedness is so

inseparable from the notion of the Deity, that whosoever professes to believe in the existence of God, must acknowledge him to be perfectly and absolutely happy. And all intelligent and rational creatures are happy only as they resemble him, and are partakers of his divine nature. The highest orders of created beings who circle his throne rejoicing, have no self-originated sources of happiness; no innate springs of blissful enjoyment. Happiness is not essential to their existence. Some of their order have forfeited their elevated station, and by renouncing their allegiance to their Creator, have incurred his heaviest displeasure; and are reserved unto the day of judgment to be adequately punished. And from an habitual consciousness that the angels who have kept their first estate derive all their happiness immediately from the Deity, they are incessant in their ascriptions of praise and adoration to Him who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever: for “they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” The state of man is peculiarly a state of dependence; he is not his own; he derived his existence from God; and it is in Him he lives, and moves, and has his being. Hence arises the necessity and propriety of prayer, which is the native language of dependence.

Prayer is a duty rendered sacred by antiquity ; a duty that has been practised in all ages, and sanctioned by all the excellent of the earth. How far any exercise that approximates, or bears an affinity, to the nature of prayer, prevails among the heavenly inhabitants, we have no means of ascertaining ; since the duties of angels, or of redeemed human spirits, form no part of the Christian revelation. But that there is a moral obligation binding man to pray, admits of no controversy. His origin, his situation, his nature, and his necessities all serve to remind him that prayer is his imperative duty and his inestimable privilege.

But what is prayer ? What is the import of this term ? What qualifications are necessary to enable a man to pray aright ; acceptably to God, and beneficially to himself ? It may be assumed, on a superficial view of the subject, that prayer, a duty so positively and frequently enjoined in the Scriptures, so adapted to meet the moral exigencies of man, so universally practised by all classes of Christians, and so essentially connected with human happiness, in time and eternity, needs no definition. But, plain as this duty appears to be, erroneous notions are commonly entertained concerning it. Its very simplicity is, perhaps, the grand reason why we are so little acquainted with its true nature. Our pride excludes the

idea that we can be mistaken on a subject so very intelligible; and while we suppose information unnecessary, we do not inquire after it. We have been taught to say our prayers when children; and too many of us have never put away childish things; but, retaining those prejudices inseparable from the feelings of infancy, mistake, through life, the mechanical articulation of a form of prayer, for that spiritual exercise of prayer which is at once the honour, the safety, and the blessedness of a sincere Christian.

Prayer, it should be recollected, is not mere speech; it is not the language of the lips; it does not consist in the utterance of any devotional sentiments. Words alone, however well chosen and adapted to express the sentiments of the mind, form no part of prayer. "This people," saith God concerning the Jews, "draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me." And if the heart be not engaged in prayer, all the words we can utter are no better than rude, offensive sounds in the ears of the Almighty. As a proof that prayer is the language of the heart, we cite the case of Hannah, of whom the inspired writer says, "Hannah spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." Eli, who stood by, thought she was drunken, and said unto her,

“How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.” The expressions used by David, and recorded in the book of Psalms, are strikingly descriptive of the real nature of prayer. “Hear the right, O Lord, attend unto my cry; give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips.” (Psal. xvii. 1.) “Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.” (Psal. xxv. 1.) “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” (Psal. xlii. 1.) “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” (Psal. lxiii. 1.) “Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.” (Psal. lxxxvi. 4.) “Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.” (Psal. cxxiii. 1.) From these texts, and many others that might be quoted, it will be seen that prayer is an immediate address to the Deity. It is an emotion of the heart engaged with God; it is a pouring out of the soul in devout supplication. “It is not eloquence, but earnestness; not figures of speech, but compunction of soul.” Hence, prayer sup-

poses a sense of want. It is the language of a heart deeply affected with a sight of its necessities. He that has no knowledge of himself, no acquaintance with his moral condition as a sinner, is destitute of the most essential prerequisite for prayer. It may be assumed, that he who is in want must necessarily know it; and the assumption is correct as far as the body is concerned. Our physical necessities affect us too sensibly to be overlooked. A man who is sorely pinched with hunger, cannot remain ignorant of it. An unfortunate person beaten by the tempest, and on the point of perishing, is feelingly alive to his danger. He who is parched with thirst is well acquainted with what he wants. But a man may be in a state of the greatest moral destitution, and yet remain totally ignorant of his condition. He may be so thoroughly acquainted with his bodily necessities, as to render it impossible for him to be deceived in reference to their nature; and yet to the wants of his soul he may be an utter stranger. With the Laodiceans of old, he may think himself rich and increased with goods, and that he has need of nothing; and know not that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Self-deception is a common evil: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" which

is an intimation that the heart is so deceitful, and so wicked, that a knowledge of it is attended with the utmost difficulty. How many, under the influence of self-love, give themselves credit for virtues which they never possessed, and think more highly of themselves than they ought to think! How many "call evil good, and good evil; put darkness for light, and light for darkness; put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" And their deception is voluntary; they love to be deceived. God's ancient people said to the prophets, "Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceit." Hence God complains, "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so." The consequence was, they healed the hurt of the daughter of God's people slightly, "skimming over the wound, and never searching it to the bottom; applying lenitives, when there was need of corrosives; soothing them in their sins, giving them opiates to make them easy in their condition, while the disease was preying upon their vitals." And the Jews were not the only persons who were deceived, and deceived even by their teachers. "Many false prophets," said our Saviour, "shall arise, and deceive many." And Satan deceives whole nations. He blinds the minds of them which

believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. And wherever the deception, in reference to our moral condition, exists, there prayer, if not totally neglected, will be carelessly and unprofitably performed. For what motive can induce a man to pray who is ignorant of what he wants? Who will ever ask God to pardon his sins, until he knows that he has been guilty of sins that must either be pardoned or punished? pardoned in this world, or punished in that which is to come. Who will ever pray that God will create in him a clean heart, and renew in him a right spirit, until he finds out the desperate wickedness of his heart, and the perverseness of his own spirit? And who will ever ask God to save him from perdition, until he has a lively conviction of the imminent danger to which he is exposed? "We know not," saith the apostle, "what to pray for as we ought;" and for this plain reason, because we know not ourselves. We are unacquainted with the depth of our depravity, the wickedness of our hearts, the iniquity of our lives, and the sentence of condemnation that is gone forth against us. Nor is it possible for us to know ourselves, as moral agents, by the efforts of our own reason, or by any words which man's wisdom teacheth. It is by the unction of the Holy One

that we know all things. The Holy Ghost is our great teacher. He takes of the things of God, and shows them unto us. "The Comforter," saith Christ, "which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." And lest any should imagine that this bestowment of the Spirit was confined exclusively to the apostolic age, St. Peter, in addressing the Jews at the feast of Pentecost, declares, "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

But it is in, and by, the ministration of the word that the Holy Ghost is ordinarily imparted. The Gospel is the ministration of the Spirit; and it is God's great instrument for the conversion of sinners. Christ's commission to St. Paul was, "Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me." But the Gospel is ministered in vain, without the agency of the Holy Ghost to accompany that ministry. Hence it is said of the primitive apostles,

that "they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." And writing to the Thessalonians, St. Paul said, "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

Prayer supposes not only a sense of want, but an ardent, restless, importunate desire to have that want supplied. The former may exist without the latter. We may know what we want, and yet evince no anxious solicitude to have our wants redressed. We may have "the seeing eye," without "the feeling sense." There may be light without heat; knowledge without zeal; a clear head, with a cold heart. Many know they are sinners who have no desire to be saints. They know they are exposed to danger, but they make no efforts to escape it. While their understandings are enlightened, their hearts are unaffected. They have no moral feeling, their consciences are callous, and their hearts as cold and dead as stones; and if such persons ever pray, their prayers are unavailing in the sight of God, for want of that fervency of spirit, and importunity of desire, by which the prayers of saints are uniformly characterized.

And the same Spirit that enlightens the understanding will, if not resisted, affect the

heart, and convict the conscience of the evil of sin, and the danger to which it inevitably exposes us; and thus lead us to cry for mercy, and seek redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of all our sins. And for this purpose God, by the mouth of the prophet, declares, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

Prayer also implies the expression of our desires unto God. It is the unbosoming of our hearts unto Him who looketh at the heart, and requireth truth in the inward parts. It is speaking unto God; laying open all our desires and wants unto him, and asking at his hands the blessings that we need. This may be done mentally or vocally; with or without words. When God said to Moses, "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" there is no evidence that he had uttered a single sentence, or even articulated a single word; but, like Hannah, he had prayed in his heart, and with his spirit he had held intercourse with God. On the other hand, we are commanded to take with us words, and return unto the

Lord, and say unto him, "Take away iniquity, and receive us graciously." And in the Psalms of David, we often read of his crying unto God with his voice, and making supplication with his tongue. "Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer." "I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication." "Lord, I cry unto thee; make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice when I cry unto thee." Daniel said, "Whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation." And Job chose out his words to reason with God. And as "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him;" whether we breathe out our desires unto God with or without words, our prayers will be acceptable in his sight, and be marked with the tokens of his approbation.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER.

By the spirit of prayer we understand that temper or disposition of mind which is essential to the right discharge of this devotional exercise. There is a preparation of heart which is necessary for the acceptable performance of every religious duty. Our Saviour reproved the ancient Pharisees for their fasts and alms; not because fasting and alms-giving formed no part of their duty, but because human glory was the sole object at which they aimed; and therefore said Christ, "They have their reward."

The spirit of prayer is a spirit of genuine humility and profound self-abasement. God, to whom we pray, is an awful Being. His incomprehensible subsistence in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; his eternal power and Godhead; his inconceivable distance from all creatures; his essential purity; his glorious majesty, in whose sight all the nations of the earth are as nothing; and less than nothing, and vanity; and his eternity, immensity, and infinity; are subjects that cannot fail to inspire us with deep lowliness of mind, when we

approach his awful majesty. And while, on the one hand, we contemplate the infinite glories of the Deity, we should, on the other, look at our frailties, our imperfections, and our crimes. We are worms of the earth, creatures who are but of yesterday, and who know nothing; and especially we are sinners, guilty, condemned criminals, who have merited, and can merit, nothing but the punishment due to sin. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed: it is because his compassions fail not." Such considerations are eminently calculated to humble us before God, and to lead us to abase ourselves as in the dust in his presence. We should also recollect that in prayer we come as suppliants to the throne of grace, sueing for mercy; as criminals deprecating punishment, and asking pardon of our Sovereign, whose laws we have repeatedly and wilfully violated. And if ever we should be clothed with humility, it is when we assume the attitude of prayer. Look at Abraham, when pleading with God on behalf of the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah; and hear his language, "Let not the Lord be angry; behold, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." A measure also of the same lowliness of spirit Job felt, when he said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye

seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Hear also the language of David. "Lord," saith he, "my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." Under the Old Testament dispensation, when God would sum up the things which are pre-eminently good in his sight, humility is marked as one. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly." "He forgetteth not the cry of the humble." "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble." "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Nor are the scriptures of the New Testament less commendatory of the grace of humility: "He that exalteth himself shall be abased, but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." "Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” “Whosoever humbleth himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

The parable of the Pharisee and publican was spoken by our Lord, to illustrate the widely different effects between the prayer of a vain man, proudly puffed up in his fleshly mind, and that of a deeply humbled sinner, overwhelmed with a sense of his demerit and danger: the one thanking God that he was not as other men; and the other smiting on his breast, and exclaiming, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” “I tell you,” saith our Saviour, “this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.”

The spirit of prayer is a spirit of godly sincerity. Sincerity is opposed to hypocrisy, dissimulation, or guile. It is to be in reality what we are in appearance. The Being to whom we pray is not capable of being deceived. God is not mocked. There is no creature that “is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” He does not judge according to outward appearance, but judgeth righteous judgment. The heaviest woes, and the most dreadful anathemas, which Christ, in the days of his

flesh, denounced against any classes of sinners, were those of the Scribes and Pharisees; and principally, if not solely, on account of their insincerity. They imposed upon others by their external semblance of sanctity. "Woe unto you," said our Saviour, "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." "They devoured widows' houses," says Henry, "either by quartering themselves, and their attendants, upon them for entertainment; or by insinuating themselves into their affections, and so getting to be the trustees of their estates, which they could make an easy prey of; for who could presume to call such as they were to an account? And their long prayers were made up of vain repetitions; and they were for a pretence; for by them they got the reputation of pious, devout men, that loved prayer, and were the favourites of heaven; and, by this means, people were made to believe it was not possible that such men should cheat them."

From the above observations, we may see how hateful hypocrisy is in the sight of God; who must be worshipped, if worshipped at all, in spirit and in truth. That our prayers may therefore be acceptable to our Maker, let us sincerely desire the blessings for which we

pray. Let us utter no sentiments, and use no language, but such as spring from our hearts. Are we sinners? Then let us confess our sins, with all their aggravating circumstances, and not attempt to cloak them before the face of Almighty God, our heavenly Father. Are we seeking for pardon? Then let us sincerely ask it at his hands. St. Paul prayed for the Philippians that they might "be sincere, and without offence till the day of Christ." And, writing to the Corinthians, he says, "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."

The spirit of prayer is a spirit of faith. Our success in prayer depends mainly on the confidence which we have in Him to whom we present our petitions. "All things," said our Saviour, "whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." "All things are possible to him that believeth." "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shalt see the glory of God?" "Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." "This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth

us." "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him; but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the winds, and tossed; for let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." Prayer must be regarded as a means, and not rested in as an end. He that makes prayer the end of prayer, thinking when that holy duty is performed, there is no more to be done, prays to no purpose. In prayer there should always be a confident expectation of success; a belief that God will grant us the desires of our hearts. It was said of Abraham that "he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;" that is, he disputed not, did not debate the matter, but settled his heart upon God's power and promise. Faith in prayer is founded on the divine veracity: we believe that God will hear us because he hath promised to do it; and we take him at his word. It is impossible for God to lie; he cannot deny himself. "I am," saith he, "the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." It is said of the Old Testament saints, that through faith they obtained promises; that is, the accomplishment of the divine promises. If, there-

fore, the promises are not obtained, there must be some culpable defect in our faith. As there is a reason for the hope that is in us, so there is a reason for our faith: that reason is the promise of God. God hath spoken: that is the ground of our faith: what he hath spoken, is the measure of our trust. There may be a general confidence in the veracity of God, a belief that he is unchangeably true, without that special trust, that implicit confidence for the accomplishment of the promise for which we plead, and for the fulfilment of which we wait. In addition to this, there must be an act of special trust in God for the present communication of those blessings which we particularly need, and which the promises of God authorize us to expect. The language of saving faith is, "I claim the blessing now;" and God will honour this absolute reliance upon his veracity, power, and love, by communicating to those who thus honour him, the joys of pardon and holiness. Whereas we may rest in this general confidence, and, after all, perish in our sins.

" Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, ' It shall be done ! ' "

The spirit of prayer is a spirit of fervency and

intensity of desire for the blessings for which we pray. Scripture prayers are fervent prayers. Hence we have such expressions as the following: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow; then called I upon the name of the Lord, O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." "Like a crane, or a swallow, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments; I would know the words which he would answer, and understand what he would say unto me." "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not for thine own sake, O my God; for thy city, and thy people, are called by thy name." And it is said of Christ, when he retired into the garden of Gethsemane, that, "being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." And in another place it is said, "that he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save him from death." And with such examples before our eyes, are we not justified in being fervent, and urgent in our

addresses unto God? Let us consider the inestimable value and importance of the blessings for which we pray: blessings, for the purchase of which the Redeemer sacrificed his soul, and laid down his life: blessings, the worth of which surpasses the power of language to describe, and the utmost stretch of the capacity to conceive: blessings which the saints of God have prized so highly, that, rather than relinquish them, they have endured "a great fight of afflictions," and gone to the rack, the gibbet, the wheel, or the flames: and blessings that we must realize in our own personal experience, or else become the subjects of the divine indignation upon earth, and the victims of eternal punishment in hell. And we have not only blessings to secure, but evils from which we must obtain deliverance: evils dreadfully malignant in their nature, and awfully ruinous in their consequences: evils which will render the immortal existence of countless myriads of human beings an eternal curse to them, and of whom it may be said, Better for them if they had never been born. And can we be too fervent, too much in earnest, to secure those blessings, or to be saved from these evils? All human efforts ought to be proportioned to the objects which they are designed to effect. To call forth the utmost energies of the mind, or the powers of the body, for the

accomplishment of some trivial object, or the gratification of some petulant passion,

“ Resembles ocean into tempest wrought,
To waft a feather, or to drown a fly.”

But, on the other hand, where the object which we wish to secure is indescribably important, there we resort to the use of means the most energetic, and efforts the most adapted to attain the end. If we saw, for instance, our lives in imminent danger; were we exposed to the jaws of a lion, or the paws of a bear; or were we to awake at midnight, and see the house in which we lived in flames about us, and we liable to be buried in its burning ruins; should we content ourselves to solicit help in a cool, dispassionate, apathetic manner? Should we not pray in all the agony of intense desire, and earnest importunity, to those who might be near, for pity's sake, to devise some method to save us? And if the natural life of the body be so precious, of how much greater value is the never-dying life of the soul! If the fires which threaten to consume the former be so much to be dreaded, how much more ought we to dread the flames which would torment the latter! If self-preservation would justify us in crying fervently for help from our fellow-creatures, when the body is in danger of natural death, with how much greater

reason would it exonerate us from all blame in beseeching God earnestly, for his mercy's sake, to save us when the soul is in danger of eternal death! Surely,

“On such a theme 'twere impious to be calm.”

The spirit of prayer is a spirit of sacred importunity. We should urge our plea with earnest and continued solicitation. There may be reasons in the divine mind, with which we are unacquainted, why our prayers are not answered the moment they are offered; why we must seek, and knock, and wait upon God until he have mercy upon us. It is enough for us to know that God does not ordinarily bestow his spiritual blessings at our first asking; that he requires us to be urgent, eager, free, and bold; and, in a manner, peremptorily importunate at the throne of grace. This apparent delay on the part of God in answering our petitions, may teach us how highly we ought to prize the blessings which have cost us so many tears and prayers, and urgent solicitations, to procure. “There was,” said our Saviour, “in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary;” or, Do me justice against mine adversary. “And he would not for awhile: but afterward he said

within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily." Now the design of this parable is evidently to show, that if a judge, an unjust judge, who was made up of a monstrous compound of impiety and inhumanity,—who neither feared God, nor regarded man,—would do a poor widow justice against her adversary, merely for her importunity, God most assuredly will avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him. The widow was relieved, not because she asked relief, but because she continued asking; because she earnestly and importunately urged her suit; and God is said to avenge his own elect, not because they cry to him now and then, but because they "cry day and night unto him."

On another occasion, our Lord said, "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come unto me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut,

and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." And what use did our Saviour make of this circumstance? Why, said he, "I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." "Here," says Dr. Barrow, "our Saviour intimateth, where, comparing the manner of God's proceeding with that of men, he representeth one friend yielding needful succour to another, not barely upon the score of friendship, but *for his impudence*; that is, for his confident and continued urgency; admitting no refusal or excuse. So doth God, in such cases, allow and oblige us to deal with him, being instant and pertinacious in our requests, *giving him no rest*; (as the phrase is in the prophet;) not enduring to be put off, or brooking any repulse; never being discouraged, or cast into despair, by any delay or semblance of neglect. We *may wrestle with God*, like Jacob; and with Jacob may say, *I will not let thee go, except thou bless me*. Thus God suffereth himself to be prevailed upon, and is willingly overcome: thus Omnipot-

tence may be mastered, and a happy victory may be gained over Invincibility itself. Heaven sometimes may be forced by storm, or by the assaults of extremely fervent prayer: it assuredly will yield to a long siege. God will not even hold out against the attempts of an obstinate suppliant. So *the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*. We read in St. John's Gospel of a man that, being thirty-eight years diseased, did wait at the pool of Bethesda, seeking relief: him our Lord pitied and helped, crowning his patience with miraculous relief, and proposing it for an example to us of perseverance.

The spirit of prayer is a spirit of implicit dependence on the agency of the Holy Ghost. Genuine prayer is the effect of the Spirit's influence. Hence such texts as the following:—"I will pray with the Spirit." "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost." "The Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what to pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit,

because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." "We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are freely given to us of God." One of the peculiar titles of the Holy Ghost is that of "the Spirit of supplication;" because of that special influence which he exerts in bestowing this gift upon us. He must open our lips, before our mouths can show forth his praise. The Spirit maketh intercession for us; as he dictates our requests, indites our petitions, and draws up our plea for us. Christ intercedes for us in heaven, and the Spirit intercedes for us in our hearts; so graciously hath God provided for the encouragement of those who pray. "The Spirit, as an enlightening Spirit, teacheth us what to pray for; as a sanctifying Spirit, works and excites praying graces; as a comforting Spirit, silences our fears, and helps us over all our discouragements; and is the spring of all our desires and breathings after God."

In our prayers, therefore, we should ask the aid, and depend on the assistance, of the Holy Ghost, that our prayers may have power with God. And if in the secrecy of our closets we employ language in making known our requests unto him, can we do better than to employ his own language? Are we seeking for the pardon

of our sins? Then what can be more simple, and at the same time more energetic, than the following expressions?—"God be merciful to me, a sinner." "Lord, save, or I perish." "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." Are we seeking the regeneration of our nature? How appropriate and significant are the following expressions!—"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." Are we seeking to have a right judgment in all things? Then hear the language of David: "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee." Or that of his illustrious son Solomon: "Give thy servant an understanding heart, that I may judge thy people; that I may discern between good and bad." Are we afflicted? Then such prayers as the following are recorded for our instruction:—"O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me." "Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged: O bring thou me out of my distresses. Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sin."

“ Remove thy stroke away from me : I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.” “ Consider mine affliction, and deliver me : for I do not forget thy laws.” Such is the language of the Holy Ghost ; and though the phraseology employed in our prayers cannot be uniformly and literally scriptural, yet no sentiments should be introduced, no language uttered, no petitions urged in our devotions, that do not harmonize with Scripture verities, and are not sanctioned by Scripture examples.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE SEVERAL PARTS OF PRAYER.

“PRAYER,” according to Cruden, “comes from a word in the Hebrew, which signifies appeal, interpellation, intercession; whereby we refer our own cause and that of others unto God as judge; calling upon him, appealing to him for right, presenting ourselves and our cause unto him.” Prayer is, therefore, a comprehensive term, it has a great latitude of signification, and includes several particulars.

The first thing to be considered in the nature of prayer is invocation; or calling upon the object to whom we pray. This object is God, and God alone. “O Thou,” saith David, “that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.” The Papists pray to the Virgin Mary, in the following language:—“O blessed Lady, have mercy upon us, preserve thy servants: let the merits of Saint Mary bring us to the kingdom of heaven. Do thou protect us, drive away evil from us: in right of a mother, command thy Son.” They also pray to departed saints, and even to images and idols, the work of their own hands. But no crucifix or image must be used

in worship until first devoutly consecrated by the priest. The consecration prayer is, "We implore thee, O Lord, holy Father, omnipotent and everlasting God, that thou wilt vouchsafe to bless this wood of thy cross, that it may be to mankind a healthful remedy, the strengthener of faith, an inciter to good works, the redemption of souls; and that it may be a comfort, protection, and safeguard against the cruel darts of their enemies, through our Lord Jesus Christ." But as prayer is a special part of religious worship, we are prohibited by our Saviour from offering it to any being except to God alone. For "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

In prayer, therefore, we invoke the Deity; we call upon his name, and address him by such titles and designations as are employed in the Scriptures of truth to describe his nature. No creature can conceive what God is; no man by searching can find out the Almighty to perfection. No language can set him forth in all the excellencies of his character. But he has graciously condescended to reveal himself by certain names, titles, and attributes. He is called "JEHOVAH;" (Isai. xii. 2;) "the God of heaven;" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 23;) "the God of the whole earth;" (Isai. liv. 5;) "the God of all grace;" (1 Pet. v. 10;) "the God of all comfort;"

(2 Cor. 1, 3;) “the God of patience and consolation;” (Rom. xv. 5;) “the God of peace;” (Heb. xiii. 20;) “the God of pity;” (Psal. lxxxvi. 15;) “the true and living God;” (Jer. x. 10;) “a jealous God;” (Exod. xxxiv. 14;) “the mighty God;” (Gen. xlix. 24;) “God alone;” (Psal. lxxxvi. 10;) “the incorruptible God;” (Rom. i. 23;) and “the God of gods.” (Deut. x. 17.) He is also called “the Lord God;” (Gen. ii. 8;) “the Lord of glory;” (1 Cor. ii. 8;) “the Lord of heaven and earth;” (Matt. xi. 25;) “the Lord of the harvest;” (Luke x. 2;) “the Lord of hosts;” (Isai. xiv. 27;) “the Lord of lords;” (Deut. x. 17;) “the Lord of the vineyard;” (Matt. xxi. 40;) and “the Lord mighty in battle.” (Psal. xxiv. 8.)

But while the Deity is described in the Scriptures by titles illustrative of his glorious majesty and absolute dominion, titles which are eminently calculated to inspire us with the most profound reverence, and deep self-abasement of soul; he is also represented by images of a most endearing character, which can scarcely fail to awaken in our minds feelings of affectionate regard and implicit confidence. “He is a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” (Psal. ix. 9.) “He is the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble.” (Jer. xiv. 8.) “He is the Fountain of living

water." (Jer. ii. 13.) "He is the Shepherd of Israel." (Psal. lxxx. 1.) And especially he is a Father; and "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." (Psal. ciii. 13.)

The next in order in the several parts of prayer, is adoration; which consists in rendering to God the honour due unto his name. The ancient Romans practised adoration at their sacrifices and other solemnities. Usually, there were images of their gods placed at the gates of their cities for those who went in or out to pay their respects to. The word adoration is compounded of *ad*, "to," and *os, oris*, "mouth;" and literally signifies to apply the hand to the mouth, or to kiss the hand. The devotee, having his head covered, applied his right hand to his lips, the fore-finger resting on his thumb, which was erect, and thus, bowing his head, turned himself round from left to right. A custom of this kind is evidently referred to by Job, when he said, "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness, and my mouth hath kissed my hand; this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above." (Job xxxi. 26—28.) And God said to Elijah, "I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and

every mouth which hath not kissed him," or kissed towards him. "Those who adore," says St. Jerome, "used to kiss their hands, and to bow down their heads; and the Hebrews, according to the idiom of their language, put kissing for adoration." Thus, (Psal. ii. 12,) "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way;" that is, adore the Son, and submit to his government. The practice of adoration may be said to be still subsisting in England, in the ceremony of kissing the king's or queen's hand, and serving them at table; both being performed kneeling on one knee.

But the adoration which we are bound to pay to God does not consist in acts of external homage, or any prostration of body that we may practise before him; but it is the homage of the heart; it is that profound veneration and reverence of the inward man which bears some distant resemblance to what those exalted beings feel who veil their faces with their wings, and "cast their crowns before his throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Another part of prayer consists in confession. The Scriptures furnish us both with precepts and examples on this subject. Under the law,

Aaron was commanded to take a live goat, and to "lay both his hands upon his head, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited." (Lev. xvi. 21, 22.) "In the twenty and fourth day of this month," says Nehemiah, "the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part, they confessed, and worshipped the Lord their God." (Nehem. ix. 1—3.) When Achan had committed the accursed thing, and the people fled before their enemies, and their hearts melted and became as water, Joshua said to him, "Give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me." (Josh. vii. 19.) When David, at the reproof of Nathan, was stung with remorse of conscience

for his foul offences, he said, "I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." When John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness, "then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." (Matt. iii. 5, 6.) After St. Paul had been preaching at Ephesus, it is said, "Many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds;" that is, formally disavowed their former life and practice. (Acts. xix. 18.) And thus, it is said, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Prov. xxviii. 13.) "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John i. 9.)

The Papists have what they call a *sacrament of penance*, by which a man is bound, at least once a year, to confess to the priest all the sins he hath committed since his last confession, with all their circumstances. And from this law none are exempted; neither prince nor king; no, not even the Pope himself. In it they place a great deal of merit, and opinion of sanctity. The truth is, this is a great artifice and engine, by which they keep the people devoted

to their interests; the knowledge of secrets rendering them the more to be feared. In short, this scrupulous enumeration of their sins, with all their circumstances, under the pain of *anathema*, is nothing but a rack to the conscience, invented and exercised without any reason; no man's memory being capable of answering what is required of him.

It is to God, and to him alone, that we are bound to confess our sins. Our sins of omission. What duties we have neglected to perform; what opportunities we have had for prayer which we have omitted; how little we have had of the spirit of prayer, even when we have approached the mercy-seat; what wanderings of heart from God; what coldness of affection, and what vain thoughts and worldly cares have obtruded on those hours which should have been consecrated to devotion; how often we have neglected to watch against the temptations by which we have been assailed; how frequently we have allowed the enemy to gain the advantage over us; what sinful tempers we have indulged; what unprofitable words we have spoken; and what iniquitous actions we have committed:—all of which might, by the grace of God, have been avoided, had we been on our guard against the encroachments of evil. We should confess our ingratitude to God. Though

God has been loading us with his benefits; benefits temporal and spiritual, personal and relative; benefits of which we are totally unworthy and undeserving; yet how often have we neglected to render again according to the benefits conferred upon us! How little of genuine gratitude has been found in our hearts, and expressed by our lips! We should confess our inattention to the means of grace, and the public ordinances of religion; how frequently we have omitted to attend the ministration of the word. Instead of being swift to hear, we have allowed the concerns of the world to occupy that time which should have been spent in God's house; or we have profited little by what we have heard. We have not received the word in honest and good hearts; or we have sat in judgment on our teachers, and been more solicitous to please our fancy than to reform our lives.

And we should not only confess our omission of duties, but our commission of crimes; not only what we have left undone that God has peremptorily enjoined, but what we have actually done, that he has positively prohibited. We should confess the sin of our nature, our original depravity, our inclination to evil: the sins of our youth, when we went astray, speaking lies: the sins of our riper years, when God was not in all our thoughts; and when we wilfully and delibe-

ately violated his law, which is holy, just, and good. And while we acknowledge our sins, let us deprecate the punishment which we have so justly merited; and say, with the Psalmist, "If thou shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

Prayer also includes petition; which is the most important and essential part of prayer. This implies an earnest desire to be delivered from the evils of our hearts, and an ardent solicitation to obtain all the blessings which God has promised in the Gospel of his dear Son. Our Saviour has taught us to pray, that we may be delivered from evil; from that bias to evil to which we are so prone; from the guilt which we have contracted by the practice of evil; from the dominion and ascendancy which evil hath obtained in our hearts, by its reiterated acts; from the darkness of our understandings, the perverseness of our wills, the hardness of our hearts, the carnality of our affections, and all the vain thoughts, foolish imaginations, and carnal propensities that lodge within us. We also pray that we may be delivered from the evil one; that is, from the devil, who goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; that we may not be ignorant of his devices; that we may be able, by the shield of faith, to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

In our petitions we not only beseech God to deliver us from all that is evil, but to confer upon us all that is good; to supply all our wants for body and soul, for time and eternity. We pray for our daily bread; that He who feeds the fowls of the air, that have neither storehouse nor barn, may feed us; and that He who clothes the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, may clothe us. Especially we pray that the necessities of our souls may be graciously supplied; that the eyes of our understandings may be enlightened, that we may see light in God's light; that He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness may shine into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We pray that He who pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin, may forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances; and that he may give us the knowledge of salvation by the remission of our sins; that his Holy Spirit may

“Assure our conscience of its part
In the Redeemer's blood;
And bear his witness with our heart,
That we are born of God.”

We pray for an increase of grace, for richer and more copious effusions of the Holy Spirit; that

the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus; that, amidst all the trials and calamities of life, we may in patience possess our souls; that the word of Christ may dwell in us richly; and that we may walk in the light as God is in the light. We pray that we may be sanctified wholly; and that our whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that, finally, an entrance may be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In our petitions, also, we are allowed to pray for benefits suited to our various exigencies and different situations in life. "Is any among you," saith the apostle, "afflicted? Let him pray." Afflictions are incentives to prayer; and prayer is our only asylum in the hour of affliction. Then we should pray for divine instruction, that we may know why God contendeth thus with us. "For affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." Affliction is God's rod; and we are commanded to hear the rod, and He that hath appointed it. It hath a voice, and we must learn to understand the language of it. God, in every affliction, "performeth the thing that is appointed for us." And we should pray that

our affliction may be sanctified to us; that while God brings us through the fire, he may refine us as silver is refined, and try us as gold is tried. He doth not afflict us willingly, but he does it "for our profit; that we may be partakers of his holiness." "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." And we are allowed to pray, submissively, that he may remove his stroke away from us. Thus St. Paul, when troubled with a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, "besought the Lord, thrice, that it might depart from him." And of the Israelites it is said, "They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses."

Nor is it in affliction only that we are encouraged to commit our cause unto God; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, we are to make our requests known unto him. There are certain eventful periods in our lives, changes in our circumstances that we meditate, and connexions that we are about to form, when we need divine direction. How admirable and praiseworthy was the conduct of Abraham when he commissioned his servant to go to a distant country to procure a wife for his son! How

much he deprecated his forming an alliance with one of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom he dwelt! And with what simplicity and earnestness did the servant offer his prayer to God for direction! "O Lord God," said he, "of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham." And the sequel of the history furnishes us with ample proof of the success with which the servant's supplication was crowned.

Finally, prayer includes thanksgiving. Thanksgiving has ever been considered a part of prayer. "I exhort," says St. Paul to Timothy, "therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour." It is said of Mattaniah, that "he was the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer." (Nehem. xi. 17.) "And at the dedication of the wall at Jerusalem, they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgiving, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps." (Ch. xii. 27.) And "in the days of David and Asaph of old, there were chiefs of the singers, and songs of

praise and thanksgiving unto God." (Ch. xii. 46.) And at "that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." (Ver. 43.) And the apostle, to the Ephesians, says, "Giving thanks always, for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." And he exhorts the Philippians to be "careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" to "let their requests be made known unto God." And to the Colossians he says, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same, with thanksgiving."

Thanksgiving is the expression of obligation. "It implies," says Dr. Barrow, "a right apprehension of the benefits conferred; a faithful retention of benefits in the memory, and frequent reflections upon them; a due esteem and valuation of benefits; a reception of those benefits with a willing mind and vehement affection; a due acknowledgment of our obligations; endeavours of real compensation; or, as it respects the divine Being, a willingness to serve and exalt him; and esteem, veneration, and love of the benefactor."

To comprehend the total amount of the obligations we are under to God, and to

estimate fully the value and variety of the blessings which we have already received from him, and especially the endless treasures of blessings reserved for us in heaven, is impossible. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." "We know not what we shall be." The present is but the infancy of our being, and eternity alone can disclose the boundless state of blessedness to which, as redeemed human spirits, we are entitled. Among the blessings for which we are obligated to thank God, the first in order is that of our creation. He commanded us into existence. His fiat gave us birth; and for our very being we ought to bless God. Life in its humblest and most abject state is a blessing. God hath made nothing in vain; and it cannot be supposed that a Being of boundless benevolence would call any creature into existence but for its good. The existence of man especially demands his gratitude. "Thou madest him," saith the apostle, "a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands." "I will praise thee," saith David; "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well." We are bound to

thank God, not only for our being, but for our well-being; for the period of the world in which we live, and for the country which we inhabit. Never since "Adam was first formed" were any of his sons ever placed in circumstances more calculated to secure their personal comfort, intellectual improvement, and eternal blessedness, than those with which the people of this country are favoured. Like Israel of old, we have great and goodly cities that we builded not; houses full of good things which we filled not; wells which we digged not; and vineyards which we planted not. We inhabit an island whose rampart is the sea; we have mechanics and artisans that erect our houses, make our apparel, and minister to our comfort; we have wholesome laws that secure to us our property; we have ships, that waft the treasures of distant countries to our shores; and who but God hath made our country to differ from the dark places of the earth which are full of the habitations of cruelty? He hath fixed the bounds of our habitations, and given us all things richly to enjoy.

We are bound also to thank God for our continual preservation. God is emphatically called, "the Preserver of men." "O Lord," saith the Psalmist, "thou preservest man and beast." "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: which

holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved." "It is in him we live, and move, and have our being." He feeds us with food convenient for us. "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man; that he may bring forth food out of the earth." He defeats the designs of our enemies, and covers our heads in the day of battle. He interposes, by his ever-watchful providence, between us and danger. He delivers us from the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and from the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. And while many of our fellow-creatures, younger than we are, and less guilty, have been hurried into eternity, we have been spared, and the period of our probation has been continued to us. For the preservation of our lives, and all the providential blessings with which we have been crowned, let us offer unto God thanksgiving, and speak of his praise all the day long.

But, above all, we should thank God for his inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a subject that has called forth the adoration of angels. With the angel that announced the advent of Christ "there was a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will

towards men." And this is the chief theme of redeemed human spirits in heaven; for they cry with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

That we may form some adequate conception of the obligations we are under to God for the gift of his well-beloved Son, and what a debt of endless gratitude we owe him for this gift, let us attentively consider the supreme dignity and ineffable glory of Him who sacrificed his soul for our salvation. Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh: God over all, blessed for ever. He was co-equal, co-essential, and co-eternal with the Father. "Being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made." But, though he was "in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God;" yet, when he undertook to deliver man, he did not abhor the virgin's womb. He "took upon him the form of a servant; and, being found in fashion as a man," subject to all his infirmities, and exposed to all his sufferings, "he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross:" a vile, ignominious, accursed death; for it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." And the sufferings to which Christ subjected

himself on our account were voluntary. His enemies said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save." But he could have saved himself as easily as he could save others. Had he desired it, his Father would have sent him more than twelve legions of angels to effect his rescue: but said he, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"—"I lay down my life, no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." And the transcendent excellency of the love of Christ will appear, when we consider that he died for his enemies. He expired on the cross to bring nigh to God a race of alienated and rebellious creatures; not one of whom, among the countless myriads of the world's population, either desired or deserved it. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." And,

"Thus heavenly love did outdo hellish hate,
Giving to death, and dying to redeem,
So dearly to redeem——
What hellish hate so easily destroy'd."

And since "God spared not his Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Let us join with the apostle, and say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO PRAYER.

IF prayer were a mere speculation, or an experiment, or an exercise in which we engaged without any divine warrant or promise, we might then be discouraged, and entertain doubts as to its ultimate success. The infinite disparity between God and us, his majesty on the one hand, and our meanness on the other, might paralyse all our attempts to pray, and inspire us with terror rather than trust. But the invitations which God has given us in his holy word, to make known our requests unto him by prayer and supplication are so various, and so encouraging, as to silence all our fears, and inspire us with a “confidence that puts doubt to flight.”

We are encouraged to pray from a consideration of the divine character, and the revelation which God hath made of himself in his word. Had he been described as an implacable Being, who delighteth in the death of a sinner, who is waiting to mark our iniquities, and severe to punish us for them, as ready to crush us beneath the foot of his indignation, to dash us in pieces as a potter's vessel, and

inflict upon us the vengeance of eternal fire, then we should be terrified at the thought of approaching his throne to sue for mercy. Or had He revealed himself as a Being who took no interest in our welfare, no concern to promote our happiness; or were we taught to believe from his own word that he looked upon our world and all its inhabitants as utterly beneath his regard, and too contemptible to engage his notice;

“Who sees with equal eyes, as Lord of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,
Atoms and systems into ruin hurl’d,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world;”

were this the character of God, we should have no encouragement to pray, and no confidence in prayer. Who would seek to conciliate the esteem of an inexorable being? or ask favours of one who was indisposed to grant them? But God, who is the object of our prayers, unites in himself all that is kind, pitiful, and compassionate; and there is nothing within the whole range of human language more endearing, or more calculated to awaken our regard, than the descriptions which are given of the Deity in the Bible; and nothing that can afford us greater encouragement to pray. And as far as it is possible for God himself to employ language that can convey adequate ideas

of his own nature and attributes, so far we are made acquainted with God. To quote all the passages of Scripture which are thus employed is unnecessary: let the following suffice:—"God is love." "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works." (Psal. cxlv. 8, 9.) "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." (Nehem. ix. 17.) "The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." (James v. 11.) "The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet. iii. 9.) "With the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption." (Psal. cxxx. 7.) And what is that mercy which the Scriptures so frequently ascribe to God, but a disposition to commiserate and help the miserable? Mercy has misery for its object: and to set forth the greatness, and extent of the divine mercy, the inspired writers employ the loftiest expressions. It has height: "For thy mercy," saith David, "is great unto the heavens." (Psal. lvii. 10.) And even higher: "For thy mercy," says the same inspired writer, "is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds." (Psal. cviii. 4.) And in reference to its

extent, it is as wide as the world. "For the earth," saith David, "is full of thy mercy." (Psal. cxix. 64.) And as to its duration, the expression is repeated twenty-five times in one psalm, "His mercy endureth for ever." And does not the consideration of the divine mercy encourage us to pray? Can anything be more consoling than the thought, that we address a Being who cares for us, sympathizes with us, loves us, pities us in our misery, and remembers that we are but dust? a Being who is exalted to have mercy upon us, and who looks down from heaven to see if there be any who seek after him; and of whom it is said, "As is his majesty, so is his mercy?" There is no misery that he cannot remove, no darkness that he cannot dissipate, no guilt that he cannot pardon, no sorrow that he cannot soothe, and no sinner that he cannot save.

Another ground of encouragement to pray is the sacrificial death and vicarious atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we look at ourselves as sinners, miserable sinners, sinners by nature and practice, whose sins have merited eternal punishment, and who deserve to be banished from the presence of God, and the glory of his power, we are led to inquire, How can a man be justified with God? Can God, without impeaching his justice, acquit the guilty?

Do not the Scriptures declare that, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished?" How, then, can a sinner hope for salvation? In answer to this, we say, Because "Christ, by the grace of God, hath tasted death for every man." "He bore our sins in his own body on the tree." "He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." It pleased God to bruise him, and to lay upon him the iniquity of us all. And, in conformity with these statements, Christ himself declared, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matt. xx. 28.) And again: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins." (Matt. xxvi. 28.) And, "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep." (John x. 15.) Christ having satisfied for us as our surety, and suffered the punishment due unto our sins, we have all the encouragement we can desire, to pray that God, for the sake of what his Son hath done for us, will pardon our sins, and accept us in the Beloved. In this way the apostle reasons when writing to the Hebrews. "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he

hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God: let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Heb. x. 19—22.) From this text we may see what rich encouragement we have to draw near to God in Christ with humble boldness, and full assurance of faith. Jesus, our High Priest, has opened a new and living way to the throne of grace, through his crucified flesh; and now appears in heaven itself, to recommend all believers and their prayers to divine acceptance, by the sprinkling of his blood, and the sanctifying influence of his Spirit. All that God does for us, in the exercise of his mercy, is for the sake of his Son. Are our sins forgiven? "God, for Christ's sake," says St. Paul to the Ephesians, "hath forgiven you." Are we reconciled unto God? "All things," says the same apostle to the Corinthians, "are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself, by Jesus Christ." Have we peace? It is "peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Do we "rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory?" "We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement." And since Christ, by his suffering death upon the cross,

has obtained eternal redemption for man, can it be supposed that he will refuse to grant what he died to purchase for us, when we apply to him in the way of his appointment? Was he manifested in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil? and will he not destroy those works in the souls of those who are seeking for their destruction? Can He who died for us be unwilling to save us? Is he gone to heaven to make intercession for us; and will he refuse to hear us when we intercede for ourselves? Did he not, in the days of his flesh, receive all who came to him? and can he be less willing to receive sinners now, than he was then? Is his nature changed? Is his Spirit straitened? Is his love for sinners diminished? Are his bowels of compassion shut up in displeasure? No; he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and Jesus is his changeless name.

O ye poor, broken-hearted sinners, ye weeping, humble suppliants, ye repenting, returning prodigals, ye who are writing bitter things against yourselves, and thinking that God hath forgotten to be gracious, and that his mercy is clean gone for ever; instead of looking at yourselves, and deploring your wretched condition, look to Calvary; behold the Lamb of God; view your sacrificial Victim expiring upon the cross for your salvation. "To shame your sins, He blushed

in blood. He closed his eyes to show you God." What more could he do to win your hearts, to inspire your confidence, and to save your souls, than he has done? O believe in him. Nothing but obstinate unbelief can exclude you from the full benefit of his great atonement.

We are also encouraged to pray from the precepts and promises of the Gospel. God commands us to pray; to pray always with all prayer; to pray every where; to pray without ceasing; to continue instant in prayer: and we are told that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. And why, it may be asked, these reiterated precepts, binding us to pray? If prayer were not pleasing to God, and if he were not disposed to answer our prayers, on what principle can we account for the precepts which enjoin upon us the practice of this duty? Duties never stand alone; they are not isolated acts; they are not performed for their own sakes; they uniformly refer to something beyond themselves; and are always connected with privileges. And if, as the Scripture testifies, the prayer of the upright is God's delight, we can scarcely conceive of a more powerful motive than this to induce us to pray.

But we gather additional encouragement from the promises and declarations of God, to pour out our hearts before him. It is said by the

Psalmist, "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." (Psal. cii. 17.) "Whatsoever," saith Christ, "ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." (John xiv. 13, 14.) "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matt. vii. 7, 8.) "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. xviii. 19.) And God's promises are founded on the immutability of his nature. Human promises are often violated by the fickleness and instability of our character; but God is in one mind, and none can turn him. "Prove me," saith the Lord, by Malachi, "if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Mal. iii. 10.) "Behold," saith Joshua, "this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you: all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." (Josh. xxiii. 14.) And at the dedication of the temple, Solomon bore a similar testimony. "Blessed be the

Lord," saith he, "that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised; there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant." (1 Kings viii. 56.) "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." (Isai. xl. 31.) "Ye shall call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Jer. xxix. 12, 13.) So ready is God to answer prayer, that he takes notice of the first purpose of praying. "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Isai. lxv. 24.)

Another source of encouragement to pray springs from that strong desire which all sincere seekers of salvation feel to engage in this devotional exercise. In the carnal man's mind there is not only a lamentable ignorance of God, but a total alienation of heart from him, and an inveterate enmity against him. But when the sinner is awakened to see his danger; when his eyes are opened to perceive the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the deceitfulness of his own heart, and the wickedness of his life; especially when he thinks how he has grieved God, abused his mercies, violated his holy sabbaths, neglected his ordinances, and exposed himself to the divine in-

dignation; then a conscious change takes place in the heart; the enmity of his mind is subdued; the aversion that he had from God is supplanted by a desire for his favour; and then he begins to breathe out his soul in prayer, and to

“Groan the sinner’s only plea,
God be merciful to me.”

And this change from darkness to light, from nature to grace, and from a state of carelessness concerning salvation to a state of intense desire after it, is wholly of God. He alone can excite aspirations after himself in the soul; he only can beget in us a love for prayer. And can it be imagined that there is any reluctance on the part of God to grant us the desires of our hearts? desires which he himself has formed, and of which he is the object? Can he delight to tantalise his creatures? Will he create desires and excite expectations in the soul for the enjoyment of his favour, and yet withhold that favour which is so greatly desired and so intensely solicited? That be far from him. “He cannot deny himself.” And what he hath promised, that he is able and willing to perform.

Finally, we are encouraged to pray by the gracious answers which God hath vouchsafed to his people, in the different ages of the world. In considering this subject, we must chiefly confine ourselves to the records of revelation;

to God's own account of his conduct towards his saints. Who can read such texts as the following without being encouraged to pray? "And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, O, that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested." (1 Chron. iv. 10.) "I called upon the Lord in my distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place." (Psal. cxviii. 5.) "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." (Psal. cxvi. 1, 2.) "Blessed be the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications." (Psal. xxviii. 6.) "Verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer." (Psal. lxvi. 19.) "The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping; the Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer." (Psal. vi. 8, 9.) "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." (Psal. xxxiv. 4, 6.) Sometimes God not only gives the thing that is asked, but even more than is asked. So he did to

Solomon. "Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days." (1 Kings iii. 12, 13.) It was by prayer that Daniel obtained divine instruction to enable him to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. "I thank thee," says he, "and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter." (Dan. ii. 23.) And it was while he was engaged in prayer, that Gabriel came to him, about the time of the evening oblation, "and he informed me," saith Daniel, "and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision." (Dan. ix. 22, 23.) It was by prayer that Elijah stayed the rain three years and six months; and again obtained rain in answer to prayer,

so that the earth yielded her increase. (James v. 17, 18.) When Samson was ready to perish with thirst, he prayed to God, and he brought water out of a jawbone for his supply. (Judges xv. 18, 19.) And when he was brought into the temple of Dagon to make sport to the Philistines, "he called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood; and he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life." (Judges xvi. 28—30.) It was in answer to the prayers of the inhabitants of Nineveh, who cried mightily to God, that the Lord "repented him of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not." (Jonah iii. 10.)

Nor is it to the Scriptures alone that we are indebted for proofs and evidences that God hears and answers the prayers of men. Were it possible for us to consult the experience of the countless multitude of redeemed human spirits, who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," and who are

now before the throne of God, we should find that they could all bear testimony to the same soul-encouraging truth. They were once miserable sinners upon earth; but the Spirit of God enlightened their understandings, and convicted their consciences; and from a deep sense of their guilt and danger, they were induced to call upon God in the day of trouble, and he delivered them, and gave them the "oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." And during the different stages of their Christian pilgrimage, when beset by foes, harassed by fears, oppressed by doubts, and discouraged by the difficulties of the way, they betook themselves to prayer; the Lord heard them, and delivered them from all their foes, and inspired them with strength to pursue their heavenward journey. And there is not a saint upon earth that has not had frequent opportunities of witnessing the power of prayer; not one that does not know that God is willing to receive his prayers, and to grant him the desires of his heart.

What encouragement may we gather from all these considerations to pray! We can scarcely conceive it possible for God himself to furnish us with stronger proofs, and more incontestable evidences of his readiness to grant us our petitions, than those with which he has already

favoured us. Then what should prevent us from praying? Is it the sinfulness of our past lives? Why, what evil have we done? Have we persecuted the saints? So did Saul of Tarsus; but he prayed, "And I," said he, "obtained mercy." Have we denied Christ? So did Peter; but he wept bitterly at the recollection of his sin, and Christ restored him to his favour. Have we corrupted others by our bad example? So did Manasseh; but he prayed, and the Lord was entreated of him, and pardoned his sins. Have we committed murder? So did David; for he killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; but he acknowledged his sin unto God, and he forgave the iniquity of his sin. And to silence all our doubts, and inspire us with confidence towards God; to show us that no previous sinfulness nor present unworthiness should prevent us from coming to him, we have this kind and consoling invitation: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." And again: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

CHAPTER V.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF PRAYER.

THAT prayer has its advantages, is a truth which, among Christians, admits of no controversy. Can it be supposed that God has imperatively enjoined a duty, the practice of which presents no advantage to man? Does he require men to pray merely for the sake of praying? Is prayer to be performed irrespective of its results? "I confess myself," said Paley, "unable to conceive how any man can pray who expects nothing from his prayer; but who is persuaded at the time he utters his request that it cannot possibly produce the smallest impression upon the Being to whom it is addressed, or advantage to himself." There were some of old, who insolently said, "It is vain to serve God;" and others, who in the same spirit inquired, "What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?" That the men of the world, who have their portion in this life, should imagine that prayer is a profitless concern, and a fruitless exercise, is no more than might be expected. And were worldly

wealth the only thing that can benefit man, did the happiness of his life consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses, then the advantage of prayer might be justly questioned: but there is profit which as much exceeds that which is worldly as our globe exceeds an atom; as an ocean exceeds a drop; profit that relates to body and soul, to time and eternity; all of which is secured by believing, importunate prayer:

“ For all the promises are sure
To persevering prayer.”

But to describe all the advantages of prayer surpasses the power of language: its existence will run coeval with our being, and be as illimitable as eternity. A cloud of witnesses, who are now reaping the advantages of prayer, might be brought to illustrate this subject; and who, had they neglected prayer in this world, would now have been miserable spirits in hell.

Among the advantages of prayer, we may remark that it has a direct tendency to put us out of love with sin, and to destroy that moral bias which we have to the practice of evil. Sinners uniformly delight in sin: sin is the element in which they live. They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. They declare their sin as Sodom; and, to use the figurative language of the prophet, they “ draw

iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart-rope." But though the unregenerate heart is captivated by the love of sin, and enslaved to its practice, and the members of the body yielded as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; and though all the efforts of the sinner may be totally unavailing to rid himself of the love of sin; yet let him turn to Him who is mighty to save, strong to deliver, and good to redeem. Let him enter into his closet, and shut his door, and pray to his Father who seeth in secret: let him bow down, and kneel before the Lord his Maker, and beseech him to illuminate the eyes of his understanding, that he may discover what an evil and a bitter thing sin is; that it is the abominable thing that God hates: let him pray that God may affect his heart, and bring all his sins to his remembrance, in all their enormity and with all their aggravated circumstances: and let him do this sincerely, earnestly, and importunately; and let him do it daily, and in the name and through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ; and whatever reluctance he may at first have to engage in this duty, or however defective his prayers may be, yet he will find that frequent and continued prayers will be the most likely means to beget in him the spirit of prayer. "A man that is often in his closet, on his knees to God, though he may for some

time perform; but a *lip-labour* service, will, if he perseveres, find the very labour of his lips altering the temper of his heart, and that he has learned to pray by praying often." Use is called second nature; and experience teaches us that, in proportion as we accustom ourselves to the practice of anything, we shall by degrees be transplanted into its very spirit and temper. And as there are no two elements in nature more hostile to each other than the love of prayer and the love of sin, it follows that, in proportion as the former is strengthened, the power of the latter will be diminished; according to the common adage, "that prayer will make a man give over sinning, or sin will make a man give over praying." He who sets his heart to pray against sin must vanquish it.

Should it be said, as probably it will be, that in exhorting a wicked man to pray, we exhort him to do that which he is morally disqualified from doing, since he dislikes prayer and has no heart to practise it. But that Simon Magus was a wicked man cannot be questioned; a man who imagined that the gift of the Holy Ghost might be purchased with money, and to whom St. Peter said, "I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." And yet, odious as his character was, Peter said to him, "Repent, therefore, of this thy wicked-

ness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." "Here note," says Burkitt, "a wicked man may pray, and ought to pray. Bad as Simon Magus was, St. Peter doth not drive him to despair, but directs him to his duty. Pray to God." Prayer is a part of the natural worship which we owe to God; it is the soul's motion Godward: therefore to say a wicked man should not pray, is to say, he should not turn to God. All the prayers in the world, without a man's own prayer to God for pardon and remission, will be ineffectual and unavailable to his salvation. Simon Magus desired the apostle to pray for him; but St. Peter bids him pray for himself, as ever he hopes for forgiveness with God: "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee." Without all doubt, if he had repented and prayed, he would have been forgiven. The doubt was, whether he would repent and pray, and seek forgiveness. Wicked men are condemned for the neglect of prayer. "Have all the workers of iniquity," saith the Psalmist, "no knowledge? Who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord." And the apostle St. James says, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you: cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-

mindful." Hence we learn, that prayer is a duty which wicked men are obligated to perform; and they commit sin if they live in the neglect of it.

And if by the practice of prayer we obtain a deliverance from the love and the power of sin, may we not see how advantageous it is to pray? That sin is a great evil, may be gathered from its effects. It blinds the understanding, hardens the heart, sears the conscience, and sensualizes the affections; it has turned angels into devils, lighted up the fires of perdition, and peopled hell with inhabitants. A sinner is an enemy to God; he is condemned already, and is obnoxious to the divine displeasure. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against him. Hell is moving from beneath to meet him at his coming; and indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, will be his endless portion. And if sin be such a horrid evil, so pregnant with all that is malignant, mischievous, and miserable; so much to be abhorred, detested, and deprecated; then what a blessing and an advantage to be put out of love with it, and to have that bias to its practice, to which we are so subject, entirely removed!

Nor will prayer be available only in extinguishing the love of sin in our hearts, but it will also be prevalent in procuring for us the pardon of sin, and the knowledge of salvation by the

mission of our sins. God is the moral Governor of the world; and, as such, he is emphatically called "our Lawgiver;" and his law is "holy, just, and good." But that law we have all violated; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and, consequently, all are guilty, and liable to be punished; and punished we must be in the world to come, unless we are pardoned in this world. But Christ hath purchased a pardon for us; a

"Pardon for infinite offence! And pardon
Through means that speak its value infinite!
A pardon bought with blood! with blood divine!
With blood divine of Him we made our foe."

But though this pardon is graciously offered to us without money and without price, yet it is never obtained without prayer. He who has never prayed for the pardon of his sins is every moment exposed to punishment. Among the countless myriads of human beings in all climes, and in all ages, whom God has freely forgiven, he has never yet pardoned a prayerless sinner. But all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, who seek it by believing, fervent, and importunate prayer. Look at Manasseh, a sinner of a notoriously enormous character; who had "made Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to err, and to do

worse than the heathen whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel;" who had "caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom; who had used enchantments, and witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and wizards; and wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger:" and yet he obtained mercy. But how? Why, the Lord brought upon him "the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon; and when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." We have also a remarkable instance of the prevalence of prayer, in the attainment of pardon, in the case of Hezekiah, who in his affliction turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord; and Isaiah was commissioned by God to tell him that his prayer was heard; and in the grateful recollection of what the Lord had done for him, he said, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of

corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." In the same way David expected the pardon of his sins; and therefore he prayed, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great. Look upon mine affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins." And in that admirable compendium of devotion which, for the sake of distinction, we call "the Lord's Prayer," our Saviour has taught us, when we pray, to say, "Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." And "when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

And if God, in answer to our penitential prayers, pardons our sins, and casts them as a stone into the depths of the sea, can we entertain a doubt as to the beneficial effect of prayer? "David," saith the apostle, "describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord will not impute sin." The blessedness of those whose sins are forgiven, will be most clearly understood by considering the evils from which they are delivered, the privileges of which they are pos-

sessed, and the glories to which they are entitled. They are delivered from guilt and condemnation, from the torment of an accusing conscience, from the curse of a violated law, from the wrath of God, from the foreboding of future misery, and from the danger of damnation. They are possessed of an assurance of the divine favour, of the light of God's countenance, of the joy of his salvation, of liberty of access to his throne, and a good hope through grace of being everlastingly saved. And by virtue of their being made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, they are entitled to "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Prayer is also beneficial and advantageous to us, as it furnishes the most effectual means for the attainment of divine wisdom. There are few words used in the Scriptures with a greater latitude of signification than the word wisdom. Hence we read of "the wisdom of the Egyptians;" "the wisdom of Solomon;" "the wisdom of this world;" "the wisdom which is from beneath;" "the wisdom of the just;" "fleshly wisdom;" "the wisdom of words;" "the wisdom of God in a mystery;" and, "the wisdom which is from above;" which, St. James says, "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." "Wisdom,"

says Macknight, "in the common acceptation of the word, denotes a sound practical judgment concerning things to be done or avoided. But in Scripture it signifies that assemblage of virtues which constitute true religion." Or, according to Solomon, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." There is so much said in praise of wisdom in the Scriptures, and especially in the writings of Solomon, that we cannot doubt of its being beneficial and advantageous to possess it. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days are in her right hand; and in her left riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her." "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee."

And this wisdom, on which such high encomiums are bestowed, has God for its author. Hence we read such texts as the following:—
“The Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh understanding.” “God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.” “Blessed be God; for wisdom and might are his: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.” “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called Bezaleel, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge. And in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom.”

And that God gives wisdom in answer to prayer, we have abundant evidence for believing from the Scriptures. God said to Solomon, “Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Give thy servant an understanding heart, that I may discern between good and bad. And the speech pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Behold, I have done according to thy word.” And that extraordinary wisdom that Daniel possessed, of whom it was said, that “wisdom like the wisdom of the gods was found in him,” was obtained by prayer. And, for our encouragement, we read, “They that seek the Lord understand all

things." (Prov. xxviii. 5.) Of Cornelius it was said, that he prayed to God alway; and his prayers and alms were so pleasing to God, that an angel was sent to him to instruct him in the course of duty that he was to pursue in order to his salvation. "If any of you," saith the apostle James, "lack wisdom, let him ask it of God." The Holy Ghost is the great agent by which divine instruction is communicated to the mind, and he is emphatically called "the Spirit of wisdom;" and, "If ye," saith our Saviour, "being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him?"

Another benefit of prayer results from the tendency it has to withdraw our hearts from the world; to lessen our esteem for earthly objects; and to lead us to set our affections on things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Prayerless men are pre-eminently men of this world, who have their portion in this life. Every thing about them is worldly. Their plans, and projects, and passions are all worldly. Do they possess riches? They are the riches of this world, which perish in the using. Have they honours? They are the honours of the world; for they love the praise of men more than the praise of God. Have they pleasures? They

are the pleasures of this world, which vanish as a dream, and leave room for a lasting and painful repentance. Have they cares? They are the cares of this world, which choke the good seed and render it unfruitful. Have they time? The world occupies it. Have they talents? The world engages them. Have they hearts? The world fills them. And the love of this present evil world, by which every fallen soul of man is so powerfully enticed, and so easily captivated, sensualizes the affections, brutalizes the mind, alienates the heart from God; for "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And he who thus lives will be found unfit for any society in the other world, except such as in their life-time received their good things, and at last are drowned in destruction and perdition. But prayer is an effectual antidote against the love of the world. He who prays must necessarily turn away his mind from the pursuit of worldly objects, to the contemplation of heavenly realities. In proportion as the heart is engaged with God, it will be disengaged from the world. In prayer the world is forgotten; then the soul holds intercourse with the Father of spirits, and drops for a time the remembrance of its earthly connexions, to gaze on eternal objects; then it sits in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, and the world ceases to exert

any undue influence over the affections. By resorting to prayer, to obtain the victory over the world, we imitate the example of David, who said, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word."

Prayer is also efficacious in promoting our security. We all love and desire safety. How sad it is to be always in danger, conscious danger; to live always under the apprehension that some evil is ready to befall us, or some enemy waiting to destroy us! What a miserable state to live in a forest, surrounded by lions, and tigers, and other beasts of prey; and to have no security against their attacks! On the other hand, how comfortable to know that we are safe! How must the manslayer have rejoiced, who had been pursued by the avenger of blood, to get within the walls of the city of refuge, where he would enjoy perfect security! How grateful to the heart of the shipwrecked mariner, to escape safe to land, from the fury of the tempest, and the war of elements! But what is temporal danger, the danger to which the body is exposed, compared to the danger of the soul? and our souls are exposed to the most imminent danger. We live in a world of peril; in an enemy's country. Every thing here is hostile to our peace. We are liable to be entangled in the snares of the world; sinners will entice

us; Satan and his emissaries will attack us; principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places, will annoy us. We have evil hearts of unbelief, ever ready to depart from the living God. And surrounded as we are by snares, seductions, and dangers, where can we find security? Is it in our wisdom? But our enemies are more sagacious than we are. Is it in our vigilance? Alas! of the devil and his angels it may be truly said,

“A constant watch they keep;
They eye us night and day;
They never slumber, never sleep,
Lest they should lose their prey.”

Is it in our power? But the devil is inconceivably powerful. He is the prince of the power of the air. What then can we do to escape the dangers to which we are every moment exposed? We must pray. Prayer is our only asylum in the hour of danger. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” By prayer, the people of God place themselves under the shadow of the Almighty’s wings, and there they find security. “When I cry unto thee,” saith David, “then shall mine enemies turn back; this I know, for God is for me.” “I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved

from mine enemies." St. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, after having described the several parts of the Christian's armour, adds, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

And such is the prevalence of prayer, that God, in answer to it, has frequently interposed miraculously to save his people out of the hands of their enemies. When Herod stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church, he killed James with a sword, shut up Peter in prison, and appointed a band of soldiers to prevent his escape. But prayer was made without ceasing by the church of God for him; and while they were thus engaged, an angel of the Lord descended, and by his presence illuminated the prison; and he smote Peter on the side, and immediately the chains fell from his hands, the gates of the prison opened of their own accord, and Peter hastened to his friends to rejoice with them on the great deliverance which God had wrought out on his behalf. Nor was the deliverance of Paul and Silas from prison at Philippi less remarkable, or less illustrative of the mighty power of prayer. They had been basely insulted by a lawless rabble in the market-place; many stripes had been laid upon them; and, to add to their sufferings, they were

+ thrust into the inner prison, and their feet made fast in the stocks. But though they were persecuted by men, yet they were not forgotten of God; and though shut up in prison, yet that prison was to them as the gate of heaven. For, “at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed.” Such was the prevalence of prayer, and such the miraculous interposition of God on behalf of his servants who trusted in him. The sequel of the history we all know. The circumstances of Jonah were inconceivably perilous. His situation, when in the great fish which God had prepared to swallow him up, was so horrifying, that he calls it the belly of hell; yet even there he found an asylum in prayer. “When my soul,” said he, “fainted within me, I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thy holy temple.” And by prayer he obtained deliverance. When Zerah, the Ethiopian monarch, with a thousand thousand men, and three hundred chariots, came against Asa, he “cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power:

help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee." And the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, so that they were totally discomfited and overthrown; and the Israelites carried away much spoil. When Rabshakeh, sent by the king of Assyria, with a great host, invaded Judah, and used the most blasphemous words against God, and his people, Hezekiah, in great distress, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord, and, with great importunity, prayed unto the Lord, to be saved from the hand of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria; and, in answer to Hezekiah's prayer, the Lord said, "I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake." "Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

And with such interpositions of divine providence before our eyes, we cannot doubt of the prevalence of prayer in promoting the security of the saints. And were we favoured with inspired records of the dealings of God with his people in modern times, we should find, even in our day, instances of similar deliverances

wrought out on their behalf in answer to prayer. "Safety is of the Lord;" and he who prays as he ought, whatever his circumstances may be, will be compassed about with the divine favour as a shield.

In the year 1786, in a field adjoining the road from Gravesend to Chatham, lived Mr. Fry, by trade a brickmaker, who related to a friend the following fact:—"One night last winter, after family prayer, two men knocked at the door, and asked for a light to seek a half-guinea, which they said they had dropped at our field-gate in paying a post-chaise boy. I desired the servant to open the door, and let the gentlemen have a candle. As soon as the door was open, to my great surprise, the men rushed into the house with large horse-pistols in their hands, and, with horrible oaths and imprecations, demanded my property. I answered, 'Gentlemen, don't use us ill; and take it away: it is all there before you in those drawers.' One of them guarded us, while the other cleared the drawers of all my linen and papers, and threw them on a heap in the middle of the room. When they had gotten possession of all the money I had, and my late wife's wedding-ring, which I begged for in vain, one of them asked his companion for a cord to tie us together in the middle room of the house. I now perceived our lives were in

imminent danger, and began to pray to the Almighty God, saying, 'Lord, thou art omniscient, and knowest the design of these men; and thou art omnipotent, and able to deliver; and, Lord, thou hast bidden us to call upon thee in the time of trouble, and hast promised to deliver. Now, Lord, is a time of trouble! Now hear, now answer, for thy own name and mercy's sake!' Immediately the servant-woman found such uncommon courage and strength, that she rushed by the robbers, flew out of the door, and ran into the lane towards a farmhouse, crying, 'Murder, murder! Fire, fire!' Upon which the men instantly left me, and followed her; but, being confounded, they took the Gravesend road: and the cries of the servant alarmed the people in the farmer's house, who came to our help, armed with pitch-forks, and other weapons. We pursued the ruffians to Gravesend; and, in searching the tides'-house, where passengers wait for the return of the boat, we found one of the thieves, with some of my property in his possession. We took him before a magistrate, who committed him for trial, and bound me over to prosecute. At the assizes at Maidstone, the robber was found guilty, and executed. While he was under sentence of death he confessed that it was the intention of himself and his companion to set

the house on fire, and burn us in it, that we might not tell tales. When I related my simple story to the judge and jury, how I prayed, and how my God heard and answered me, they seemed all affected."

The following providential deliverance was related by Mr. Richard Boardman, many years ago. "I preached," says he, "one evening at Mould, in Flintshire, and next morning set out for Park-Gate. After riding some miles, I asked a man if I was in my road to that place. He answered, 'Yes; but you will have some sands to go over, and unless you ride very fast you will be in danger of being enclosed by the tide.' It then began to snow to such a degree, that I could scarce see a step of the way; and my mare being with foal prevented me from riding so fast as I otherwise should have done. I got to the sands, and pursued my journey over them for some time; but the tide then came in, and surrounded me on every side, so that I could not proceed nor return back, and to ascend the perpendicular cliffs was impossible. In this situation I commended my soul to God, not having the least expectation of escaping death. In a little time I perceived two men running down a hill on the other side of the water; and, by some means, they got a boat, and came to my relief just as the sea had reached my knees, as I sat

upon my mare. They took me into the boat, the mare swimming by my side till we reached land. While we were in the boat, one of the men cried out, 'Surely, Sir, God is with you!' I answered, 'I trust he is.' The man replied, 'I know he is;' and then related the following circumstance:—'Last night I dreamed that I must go to the top of such a hill. When I awoke, the dream made so deep an impression upon me, that I could not rest. I went and called upon this my friend, and desired him to accompany me. When we came to the place, we saw nothing more than usual. However, I begged him to go with me to another hill at a small distance; and there we saw your distressing situation.' When we got ashore, I went with my two friends to a public-house not far from the place where we landed; and as we were relating this wonderful providence, the landlady said, 'This day month we saw a gentleman just in your situation; but before we could hasten to his relief, he plunged into the sea, supposing, as we conjecture, that his horse would swim with him to the shore, but they both sunk, and were drowned together.'

"I gave my deliverers all the money I had, which I think was eighteen pence; and tarried all night at the public-house. Next morning I was not a little embarrassed how to pay my

reckoning: I therefore apologized to the landlord for the want of cash, and begged he would keep a pair of silver spurs, till I should send to redeem them. But he answered, 'The Lord bless you, Sir: I would not take a farthing of you for the world.' After some serious conversation with the friendly people of the house, I bade them farewell; and recommenced my journey, rejoicing in the Lord, and praising him for his great salvation."

"Prayer," says an old author, "is so powerful that it has commanded the four elements. Air;—for St. James tells us that Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth for the space of three years and six months; and he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. Fire;—for the three children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came unsinged from the fiery furnace, the heat of which consumed those who approached it. Earth;—for at the prayer of Moses she opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah and all that appertained unto him. Water;—for at the prayer of Moses the sea fled back. What," continues he, "shall I say? It hath made the sun stand still in the firmament; fetched fire and brimstone from heaven; thrown down the walls of Jericho;

subdued kingdoms; stopped the mouths of lions. Prayer is so potent, that it raiseth the dead, overcometh angels, casteth out devils, and that which is most wonderful, overcometh that which cannot be overcome, and mastereth God himself. For doth not the Lord say to Moses, 'Let me alone;' and Moses would not let him alone until he had obtained his petition? and again to Jacob wrestling with him, 'Let me go;' and Jacob would not let him go until he had prevailed? Wherefore pray on all occasions, and that without doubting. 'I am more afraid,' said Mary Queen of Scots, 'of the prayers of Knox the Reformer, than I am of an army of ten thousand men.'

Another advantage of prayer is the consolation it affords amidst all the distressing scenes of life. Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. There are personal and domestic troubles to which we are unavoidably subject. How many are doomed to suffer severe and complicated afflictions of body! Others have to sustain the bitterest bereavements in their families: a faithful wife, the desire of their eyes, in whom their fondest affections centred, is suddenly and unexpectedly torn from their embraces; or a beloved child, the prop of their declining years, falls a prey to some malignant disease. And amidst these scenes of deep affliction, when the

heart is wrung with unutterable anguish, what comfort and support does prayer afford! How soothing it is to the smitten spirit to be enabled to pour out its sorrows before God! We all know what a relief it is to the mind to unbosom its griefs to some kind and sympathizing friend, even though it be not in his power to administer effectual relief: but how much more consolation does it afford to be enabled to look up to our heavenly Father, who is very pitiful, and of great mercy, and who knows our frame, and remembereth that we are dust. Hence prayer is often the last retreat of the wretched; it is the temple of tranquillity to the unhappy, where their minds are soothed, and their cares and sorrows are hushed, and almost forgotten. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee," said David, "when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

Are the joys of heaven to be anticipated on earth? Does faith realize the immense blessings of hope, and give us to sit and converse with Christ in heavenly places? These joys are to be felt, these blessings realized, these heavenly places opened, this glorious converse to be enjoyed, in prayer. "Prayer," says an elegant writer, "is Nebo; prayer is Tabor. On the elevated mountain of prayer we are raised far above the world; and the darkness, the thunder,

and the tempest roll beneath our feet. In this lofty region, the air is always pure; the light of eternity shines perpetually on the top of the hill. From thence we behold the palms and robes of the just; and the spirits of just men made perfect, walking before God in righteousness. If we cannot actually enter into heaven until the house of our earthly tabernacle be dissolved, and this body of our humiliation be exchanged for a body like unto Christ's glorious body, yet from thence we are permitted to look unto heaven, and admire the holy worship of that everlasting temple. If we cannot ascend to Christ and his saints, into the mountain of God, yet he and his saints descend to us, upon the mountain of prayer. Here Moses and Elijah, patriarchs and prophets, evangelists and apostles, martyrs and confessors, encourage their brethren in the patience and tribulation of Jesus. They tell us, they were men of like passions with ourselves, suffering the same evils, exposed to the same perils, and combating the same enemies; but that they overcame by the word of their testimony, and by the blood of the Lamb. Finally, it is from the mountain of prayer that we have the brightest views of Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high; and hear him addressing to us these animating words: 'Be of good courage; I have overcome the

world.' 'In the world ye shall have tribulation; but in me ye shall have peace.' 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'"

We have an instance of the soothing and consoling character of prayer in the time of great sadness, in the experience of Nehemiah. He was not only an officer in the court of the greatest king of the east, but it was his duty to be much in the royal presence. He was on a particular occasion under deep affliction; for Jerusalem was in ruins! On a certain day his sadness was so great as to be visible to the king, at whose table he was attending. The monarch inquired the cause of his sorrow, and what request he had to make. He instantly "prayed to the God of heaven," doubtless to strengthen him; and then he made his petition to the king, for no less a boon than to allow him to rebuild the walls of the sacred city. His prayer preceded his petition. It was that prayer which gave him courage to present that petition, and which, probably, induced the sovereign to grant it. What a double encouragement is here given to the courtier both to pray to God, and to speak truth to a king!

We have also the example of St. Paul recorded for our instruction on this subject. It pleased God to afflict him with some painful disease, which in consequence of the poignant

feeling that it produced, he calls "a thorn in the flesh." He desired to have it removed, and knowing that afflictions are sent to teach us to pray, and continued to instruct us to be instant in prayer, he prayed earnestly, and repeated his request that it might depart from him. But though his prayer was not answered according to his expectation; yet, as a promise was made, that grace should be imparted to enable him to bear his affliction, he said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

The late Dr. Whitehead was accustomed to repeat with pleasure the following fact:—In the year 1764 he was stationed as an itinerant preacher in Cornwall. He had to preach one evening in a little village where there was a small Methodist society. "The friend," says he, "at whose house we preached, had at that time a daughter, who lived with one of our people about ten miles off. His wife was gone to attend her daughter, who was then dangerously ill of a fever; and her husband had that day received a message from her, informing him that his child's life was despaired of. He earnestly, and with tears, desired Mr. Whitehead to recommend his daughter to God in prayer, both before and after preaching. He did so, in the most warm and affectionate manner. Late that evening,

or very early next morning, while the young woman's mother was sitting by her daughter's bedside, who had been in a strong delirium for several days, she opened her eyes, and hastily addressed her mother thus: 'O mother! I have been dreaming that I saw a man lifting up his eyes and hands to heaven, and fervently praying to God for my recovery. The Lord has heard his prayers, and my fever is gone; and, what is far better, the Lord has spoke peace to my soul, and sealed his pardoning love on my heart. I know it, I feel it, my dear mother; and his Spirit bears witness with my spirit that I am a child of God and an heir of glory.' Her mother, still thinking that she was in a delirium, desired her to compose herself and remain quiet. The daughter replied, 'My dear mother, I am in no delirium now; I am perfectly in my senses: do help me to rise, that upon my bended knees I may praise God.' Her mother did so, and they both praised God with joyful hearts; and from that hour the young woman recovered so fast, that she was soon able to attend to the affairs of the family where she lived. She had never seen Mr. Whitehead previous to this remarkable time; but some weeks after she saw him, and the moment she beheld his face she fainted away. As soon as she came to herself, she said, 'Sir, you are the person I saw in my dream,

when I was ill of a violent fever; and I beheld you lift up your hands and eyes to heaven, and most fervently pray for my recovery and conversion to God. The Lord, in mercy, heard your prayers, and answered them to the healing of my wounded spirit, and to the restoration of my body to its former health and strength. I have walked in the light of his countenance from that time to the present; and I trust I shall do so as long as I live.” How remarkably does this circumstance illustrate the words of St. James! “The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

But how forlorn is the heart, and how cheerless are the prospects, of a prayerless man! He, too, has his troubles: disappointments and crosses in his expectations, perplexities and cares in his business, afflictions and bereavements in his family, remorse in his conscience, and forebodings as to his future destiny. But where are his consolations? Alas! he has none. He has no hope, and is without God in the world. He has been hewing out cisterns, but they are broken; they hold no water. He has his portion in this world; and when death comes, he is driven away in his wickedness into outer darkness, where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Prayer is also the most essential means of |

improvement and perseverance in religion. Without prayer all other means will be inefficacious and abortive. In exact proportion as prayer is practised or restrained, so is the Christian's progress or declension in personal piety. All the means of grace are but lifeless forms without prayer. It is by coming boldly unto the throne of grace, that we not only obtain mercy, but find grace to help in time of need. Every step we take in religion is a step in advance towards the kingdom of heaven. Christianity is all progression. In commencing our religious course we enter in at a strait gate, and in proportion as we advance in religion, we walk in the narrow way; we grow up into Christ our living Head in all things; increase with all the increase of God; and go on to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. And holiness and happiness are as inseparable as the cause and the effect, the means and the end. Our increase in personal piety cannot fail to be advantageous to us. Can a man grow in grace, and yet derive no spiritual benefit from that growth? Can he abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost, and yet remain in doubt whether that hope affords him any additional consolation or not? Godliness is profitable unto all things; and will not an increase of godliness produce an additional degree of profit? Even could we imagine that prayer af-

fording no present advantages, that the Christian derived no consolation from this divinely-instituted duty; admitting it to be as irksome and wearisome as prayerless persons imagine; yet the fact, that, by the practice of prayer, we obtain a meetness for heaven, and by the neglect of it we become vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, ought to be a motive sufficiently powerful to induce us to give ourselves continually to prayer, and to watch in the same with thanksgiving.

Finally, The advantage of prayer will be seen in the reward apportioned to those who live in the practice of this most essential duty. In the instruction which our Saviour gave to his disciples concerning closet-prayer, he said, "Pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." God never said unto the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye me in vain." On the contrary, "He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." "Fear not," said God to Abraham; "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Duties will never go unrewarded. "God is not unrighteous," saith the apostle, "to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed towards his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." In addition to all the advantages which we derive from the

practice of prayer in the present world, the consolation it inspires, the protection it affords, and the promises it secures, while in the body, there is yet another blessing attendant upon it; and that is the vast and eternal reward which God will bestow upon his praying people in the last day. The scribes and pharisees did all their works to be seen of men, and of men they had their reward; but Christians do theirs as in the sight of God, and from him they will receive their abundant and eternal recompence. They pray in secret, but they will be rewarded openly. God, in the great day of eternal judgment, will openly acknowledge them as his own before men, angels, and devils; and will say unto them, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

And if prayer be productive of such fruits; if it ensure such a vast reward; if God, in answer to our fervent and importunate prayer, saves us from so many evils, and confers upon us so many blessings, blessings which will run coeval with our very existence; can we deliberately make up our minds to live in the neglect of it? Shall we relinquish all expectation of being saved? Are we in love with our own ruin? Have we made a covenant with death? and with hell are we at agreement? Shall we despise the riches of God's goodness, and forbearance, and

long-suffering, and thus treasure up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath? Of horrid things this is most horrid, and the most to be deprecated and avoided. And, thank God, we may avoid it. O let us be wise to-day.

“To-day is yesterday return’d; return’d
Full power’d, to cancel, expiate, raise, adorn,
And reinstate us on the rock of peace.
Let it not share its predecessor’s fate;
Nor, like its elder sisters, die a fool.”

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE PLACES AND SEASONS APPROPRIATED TO
SECRET PRAYER.

GOD is an omnipresent Being. The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. He filleth all places with his immense and infinite essence. He is excluded from no place, included in none; for he is without all limitation, dimension, or termination. "If I ascend up into heaven," saith David, "thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee." Since God is essentially present in every place, there is no place where prayer may not be successfully offered to him; therefore, said the apostle, "I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath

and doubting." But when we recollect that prayer is an employment which demands not only the exercise of the understanding, but the devotion of the heart, we may see the propriety of retirement from the world, and seclusion from the busy scenes of life, in order that the whole of our powers and faculties may be engaged with God in the most solemn and deeply devotional exercise in which a human creature can possibly be employed.

In the early periods of the world the worship of God was exceedingly simple. Temples and edifices consecrated to religion there were none: but it was said of the father of the faithful, that "Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God." And no doubt can be entertained, but this grove was set apart for devotional purposes; that the pious patriarch might there engage in the hallowed exercises of contemplation, meditation, and prayer. "Pliny tells us, that as groves and trees were the ancient temples, so even in his days, among the country people, where primitive simplicity still remained, it was usual to consecrate to God the most stately tree of the grove. This custom very likely began with Abraham, but it soon degenerated into gross and barbarous superstition; on which account, groves were prohibited

by the Levitical law, and ordered universally to be destroyed." The fifty-seventh Psalm, which contains a fervent prayer for divine protection, was composed and offered up to God in a cave, where David had concealed himself, to escape the fury of Saul. "Isaac went out to meditate," or to pray, as some commentators render it, "in the field at eventide." Jesus "went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." And on another occasion it is said, "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." "Peter went up upon the house-top to pray, about the sixth hour." At the hour of noon, to the house-top he retired, for the sake of secrecy; where he could neither hear, nor be heard; and thus avoid distraction and ostentation. Our Saviour, in giving directions concerning the duty of prayer, says, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." The word "closet" generally imports any secret place where a person is not seen or heard; and where he is not liable to be disturbed or interrupted in his devotions, by any noise or commotion from without. Daniel went into his

chamber, and prayed three times a day; and though he was prohibited by law from praying, and threatened with being cast into a den of lions if he persisted in the practice of prayer, yet so fearless was he of consequences, that he would not even deign to shut his window while he prayed.

Such statements lead us to conclude that retirement is favourable to prayer; and that pious people have sought and seized opportunities of being alone to pray. Is prayer the language of distress? Is it the voice of sorrow? Are we mourning after God? Do we complain in the bitterness of our souls? Then how congenial with our feelings, and what a relief to our spirits, will it be, to retire from the vanities, and frivolities, and avocations of the world, and to shut ourselves up in our chambers; and in the anguish of our spirits to weep, and pray, and plead with God for the pardon of our sins, and the salvation of our souls! Is prayer the language of love? Is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us? And can we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Then how gladly shall we avail ourselves of all convenient opportunities of going into our closets, and holding secret intercourse with God; of expressing to him the grateful feelings of our

hearts, and of consecrating ourselves afresh to his service!

“O! what a blessed thing,” says an old author, “were it, if every person in several rooms of the house were at work with God in secret prayer! How *bravely* would that house be perfumed! How well would the trade of godliness thrive! Surely such an house were a more blessed beautiful edifice than any prince’s palace under heaven. It is the disposition of Gospel penitents to mourn, every family apart; husbands and wives apart; (Zech. xii. 11, 12;) and of gracious souls to be like doves of the valleys, every one mourning for his iniquity.” (Ezek. vii. 16.) It must be allowed that many pious persons in humble life have few opportunities and conveniences for retirement; secret chambers they have none: then let them do as Isaac did, —retire into the fields to pray; or, with the Saviour, let them seek some “solitary place,” and offer up their devout supplications to God; for it is his presence alone that can impart sanctity to any place; and a praying heart will never fail to find a praying place.

As to the precise times which should be daily and sacredly set apart for the hallowed exercise of prayer, it must be obvious that no absolute rule can be laid down that is capable of universal application. The circumstances and

avocations of men are so various, that the same standard of duty cannot indiscriminately and equally apply to all. That secret prayer should be performed in the morning of each returning day can scarcely be questioned. "My voice," saith David, "shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." But let not modern manners, or the effeminacy of the age, mislead us, and induce us to suppose that, by the morning, David meant any time before noon. In the Psalms that are read in our churches, the translation is a little varied, but more definite. There the verse runs, "My voice shalt thou hear betimes, O Lord; early in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." And elsewhere David says, "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee." And again: "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried:" that is, before the darkness of night was dissipated by the light of the morning; before the sun, like a bridegroom, had come forth from his chamber, and spread his rays upon the mountains, or tinged the lofty spires with his golden beams; before the little feathered choristers had begun to chant their early lays; David's voice was heard, and his prayer had ascended to the throne of God. David was therefore an early riser; and he rose early,

not to do what those did whom Job mentions, who rose “early for a prey, to remove the landmarks, or violently to take away their neighbour’s flocks, and to feed *thereof* ;” no, he rose early to pray. Nor was he singular in his conduct of early rising. Abraham got up early to behold the awful destruction with which Sodom was visited, when “the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.” And when God commanded him to go, and offer up his only son Isaac as a burnt offering, Abraham rose up early in the morning to put into execution this heart-rending mandate. Jacob, after having slept on the ground, and been favoured with a visionary representation of a ladder set upon the earth, whose top reached to heaven, rose up early in the morning to offer up his grateful acknowledgments unto God. Moses rose early in the morning to stand before Pharaoh. Joshua rose early in the morning to pass over Jordan. Jesus came early in the morning into the temple; and all the people came early in the morning to hear him.

Prayer to God is never ill-timed, never out of season, never unnecessary; but the morning is peculiarly favourable to closet devotion. The success of our prayers with God, and their beneficial influence on our own minds, essentially depend on the manner in which they are offered.

They are successful in proportion as they are fervent, zealous, and importunate. When is the mind in the fittest state to exert itself in prayer? when are its powers the most active, and its affections the most lively? and when are our bodies the most vigorous, and the most free from fatigue and lassitude? Is it not in the morning, after a sound night's rest; after having disburdened ourselves of a load of weariness with which we lay down oppressed? Do we not frequently feel that we are scarcely like the same persons in the evenings that we were in the mornings? And have not our devotions in the evenings been as languid as our bodies, and our prayers been as dull as our frames?

And the morning is not only the most favourable time for our devotions, but the most calculated to call forth the effusions of gratitude and praise to God. Every new day is like a new period in our existence; and when we awake in the morning, in the possession of perfect health, with our strength recruited, and our bodies and minds refreshed, can we fail to reflect on the events of the past night? How many of our fellow-creatures have slept the sleep of death! how many have been deprived of "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," and exposed to "all the sad variety of pain!" how many have been confined to noisome dun-

geons, subject to "all the horrors of the gloomy jail!" how "many have been burnt out of house and home!" how many have been shipwrecked at sea, or lost in untrodden ways in the land! how many have been robbed and murdered! how many have died unprepared, and are now "lifting up their eyes in torments!" and here am I a monument of divine mercy! "I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me." "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

There is another consideration which will serve to suggest to us the propriety of morning prayer. We are ignorant of futurity; the wide and boundless prospect lies before us, but shadows, clouds, and darkness rest upon it. When we begin a new day we know not how it will terminate. "I know not," said Jacob, "the day of my death." "My times," said David, "are in thy hand." There they are concealed, and measured out, like some precious invaluable cordial, in single drops, one moment at one time; and another is not given until that is taken away. We therefore "know not what a day may bring forth." O how uncertain is our time! Where, when, and how it will end we know not; we must not, cannot know. How many rise in the morning, and go to their accustomed occupations full of health and vigour,

and before the day closes, time with them is finished, and eternity begun! Every succeeding morning we should each one think with himself, "I know not but I may die to-day! This day may terminate my probationary state of existence; it may conclude my mortal history; it may put a period to my worldly pursuits; it may, by a sudden stroke, sever my soul and body; it may extinguish the lamp of life, and reduce this animated frame to a lifeless lump of clay; it may usher my immortal soul into a world of spirits, and, before this day closes, I may be in heaven or hell, either with 'the damned cast out, or numbered with the blest!' O what an awful, momentous, and indescribable change may take place in my situation, my condition, and my feelings, ere this day closes! Thousands will begin this day as full of health, and as free from disease, as I am, who will be in eternity before night. And can I indulge in such reflections, and ponder such thoughts in my mind, and yet begin the day without prayer? Can I go to my daily duties without asking God to prepare me for the events of the day? And even if I should live through the day, yet I am ignorant of what will befall me in the pursuit of my worldly business and employment. I know not the temptations by which I shall be assailed; the snares that will be laid for my

feet; the provocation to which I shall be exposed; and the mental conflicts I shall have to endure in the course of the day. I know not how my spirit will be grieved; how my fears will be alarmed; how my confidence in God will be shaken; how my patience will be tried; into what labyrinths and perplexities I shall be brought; and what sins I may be induced to commit before night. And can I be so inconsiderate, so careless, and so utterly devoid of all real regard for my reputation, my comfort, and my soul, as to begin the day without prayer? Shall I go into the world without God? shall I not ask his aid, his protection, and his paternal care? shall I not place myself under the shadow of his wings? shall I not beg of him, on the bended knees of my body, to keep me as in the hollow of his hand; to be with me in the hour of temptation; to frustrate the infernal designs, and counteract the insidious artifices, of my most inveterate enemies? shall I not ask him to inspire my heart with a reverential regard to himself, that I may be in the fear of the Lord all the day long; and that his statutes may be my songs in the house of my pilgrimage?" O what a multitude of subjects suggest themselves to our minds in the morning of each succeeding day, for devout meditation and prayer!

Dr. Boerhaave, being asked by a friend who

had often admired his patience under great provocations, by what means he suppressed his anger, being naturally quick of resentment, answered, "that he had, by daily prayer and meditation, mastered himself. It was his daily practice to retire for an hour in the morning, and spend it in private prayer and meditation; and it gave him spirit and vigour for the business of the day."

And that we may have time for morning prayer, let us individually say, with David, "I myself will awake early." Let us not be sleeping when we ought to be praying. "Lying long and late in bed impairs the health, generates diseases, and in the end destroys the lives of multitudes. It is an intemperance of the most pernicious kind; having nothing to recommend it, nothing to set against its ten thousand mischievous consequences: for to be asleep is to be dead for the time. This tyrannical habit attacks life in its essential powers: it makes the blood forget its way, and creep lazily along the veins; it relaxes the fibres, unstrings the nerves, evaporates the animal spirits, saddens the soul, dulls the fancy, subdues and stupifies a man to such a degree, that he, the lord of the creation, hath no appetite for anything in it; he loathes labour, yawns for want of thought, and trembles at the creatures of his own gloomy imagination. The

indolent man pretends that he lies in bed because he has nothing to do; and yet he lives in the total neglect of morning prayer." Let him rise and pray, and let prayer take the precedence of every other exercise. If it be deferred, some business may come in to prevent it, or it may be hurried over without reverence and without profit.

"In early prayer who seek his love,
Shall soon the grace of *Jesus* prove;
But who in sleep their pleasure take,
Shall never find him when they wake."

But while we speak of the propriety of morning prayer, let us not overlook, or lightly esteem, the devotions of the evening. "The revolution of day and night," says a late author, "points out to us the propriety of some solemn acknowledgment of God every morning and evening. Besides, we have particular mercies to be thankful for, and particular favours to seek, every morning and every night." God appointed, under the law of Moses, that there should be a lamb offered and incense burnt every day, both in the morning and evening, at the door of the tabernacle, where he promised to meet the children of Israel, and bless them. "It is a good thing," saith the Psalmist, "to speak of thy loving-kindness every morning, and thy faithfulness every night." Before we retire to rest at night,

let us call to mind the events of the day, and we shall find subjects for humiliation, gratitude, and prayer. What cause for humiliation in reflecting on our imperfections, frailties, and the numerous deviations from the path of rectitude which have marked our steps! And what a motive for gratitude when we think of the mercies with which we have been favoured; the protection that has been afforded us; the dangers which we have escaped; the health that we have enjoyed; and the list of blessings, infinite, with which our existence has been crowned! And what a subject for prayer that God may, in the plenitude of his compassion, remit all the offences and pardon all the sins that we have inadvertently or thoughtlessly committed in the course of the day!

And to impress our minds with the propriety and necessity of prayer before we commit ourselves into the arms of sleep, let us seriously consider the dangers to which we are exposed in the night season. Thousands are hurried into eternity every succeeding night. It was at midnight that the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, when there was not a house where there was not one dead. And that was a night not less terrible when "the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thou-

sand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." What acts of cruelty are perpetrated in the night! Then the workers of iniquity, like evening wolves, prowl about to plunder their neighbours' property; these may forcibly enter our habitations in the night, and take away our lives: or the pestilence that walketh in darkness may visit us! And considering how defenceless a state of sleep is, and how utterly unacquainted we are with what may happen to us during the night, let us never retire to rest without prayer. Let us pray that God may be about our bed, as he has been about our path. That He who keepeth Israel, and never slumbereth nor sleepeth, may keep us; so that no evil may befall us, nor any plague come nigh our dwelling; that our sleep may be sweet to us; and that when we awake in the morning we may find that God is still with us. With the poet let us pray,

" O may thy angels, while I sleep,
Around my bed their vigils keep;
Their love angelical instil,
Stop every avenue of ill:
May they celestial joys rehearse,
And thought to thought with me converse."

And, in addition to our morning and evening prayers, we should avail ourselves, when it is

practicable, of retiring to our closets at noon to renew our covenant with God, and to acknowledge our obligations to him for all his benefits. This was David's practice. "Evening, morning, and noon-day," saith he, "will I pray and cry aloud." Daniel also prayed three times a day. And one of Peter's seasons for prayer was noon. And are not these examples worthy of our imitation? We find no inconvenience in laying aside our worldly business in the middle of the day to supply our bodily necessities. And is the meat that perisheth of more value than that which endureth unto everlasting life? It was an ancient adage, "that meat and matins hinder no work." Can the spiritual life of the soul be sustained with less care than the natural life of the body? Let us not forget that "prayer is the appointed means of deriving all spiritual supplies from above to support the life of religion; and, therefore, it is reasonable and our duty to make use of it: just as it is reasonable, and every man's duty, to eat and drink, because he cannot otherwise live." Those persons who cannot command any time at noon to retire to their closets to pray, may, at least, amidst the avocations of the world, lift up their hearts, and breathe out their desires after God in solemn, ejaculatory prayer. "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him." And he will fulfil

the desire of them that fear him, whether that desire be expressed in language, or only formed and fostered in the heart. It is recorded of Luther, that he prayed every day three hours: nor were his closet prayers dull, careless, or heartless; but so fervent and ardent, says Melancthon, that "they which stood under his window, where he stood praying, might see his tears falling and dropping on the ground."

CHAPTER VII.

EXCUSES FOR THE NEGLECT OF SECRET PRAYER
CONSIDERED.

THE neglect of well-known duties is a sin too commonly practised to excite any surprise. How general is that confession, "We have left undone the things which we ought to have done!" But excuses or pretexts for the neglect of duty are almost as common as the sin itself. Where is the sinner to be found who has not some plea to offer in extenuation of his sin? We have a wonderful talent at deceiving ourselves. There is scarcely a fault for which we do not find an apology. Our ingenuity on this subject is inexhaustible. What will not men do to shift off the blame from themselves? Sin is an infamous thing; it reflects on us the greatest discredit; it is a reproach to any people; and it exposes us to shame and everlasting contempt. The prophet Jeremiah mentions some, of whom he says, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not ashamed, neither could they blush." But this unblushing boldness or effrontery in the practice of sin is peculiar to

those who have, by a long course of reiterated and criminal actions, hardened their hearts and steeled their consciences against conviction. These, to use the language of the evangelical prophet, “declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not.” Sinners, however, generally have some kind of consciousness of the shamefulness of sin, and especially of some sins which are not so commonly practised as others; and hence they court concealment; and when this cannot be effected, then they rack their invention to frame excuses or palliations for their conduct.

Among the excuses which men are accustomed to make for their neglect of prayer, is their ignorance of its nature. They know not how to pray. It is a practice to which they have never habituated themselves; and they cannot tell what to say, even if they were to make an attempt. But why, it may be asked, do you not know how to pray? Were prayer a secret, or a mystery which required strong intellectual powers to comprehend; or were it necessary for you to consult skilful teachers, or practise a tedious course of study, to understand how to pray; then indeed there might be some shadow of a plea for your conduct. But among all the duties of religion, nothing can be more simple, nothing more easily understood, than prayer. It is equally plain to the illiterate and

the learned; to the obscure as to the renowned; to the peasant as to the prince. But how can you content yourself to remain ignorant of the most important duty that God ever imposed upon man? Have you no wants to be redressed; no guilt to be pardoned; no blessings to be obtained? And have you not heard of that Being who heareth prayer; who invites you to make known your wants to him; who holds out to you the sceptre of mercy, and who waits to be gracious; who is more ready to hear than you are to pray, and more accustomed to bestow benefits upon you than you are solicitous to receive them? And has not God given you a book which teacheth you how to pray; what to pray for; furnisheth language suitable for prayer; sets before you examples of prayer; and gives you encouragements to pray? And what more can you desire? Nay, what more, may we not ask, can God himself do for you to make you wise unto salvation, than what he has already done, or is willing to do for you? If, therefore, you remain ignorant of the nature of prayer, your ignorance is voluntary, inexcusable, and in the highest degree criminal. For the duties of religion can never be acceptably performed without some previous knowledge of their nature, and the obligations you are under to practise them. Ignorance of your duty totally

disqualifies you for the right discharge of it; and if you continue to remain ignorant of the nature of prayer, you will live, as you hitherto have done, in a prayerless, Christless state; and at last be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God. O consider your ways, and turn your feet unto God's testimonies. Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. Arise, and call upon God; if so be that he may think upon you, that you perish not.

Another class of persons apologize for the neglect of prayer, by alleging the dislike they have to it. Prayer is a duty for which they have no relish, to which they have no attachment, and in the practice of which they have no enjoyment. They seldom, if ever, pray, because they have no heart to pray. In the pursuit of earthly objects, and the management of their secular concerns, their hearts are all alive. They follow the world with avidity; and at the shrine of Mammon they present their offerings with alacrity and delight: but, alas! the throne of grace they approach with an ice-like apathy; as if it were the property of prayer to freeze the affections, and to turn the heart of flesh into a heart of stone. But why, it may be asked, have you such a dislike to prayer? and to what causes can you attribute the antipathy you feel

to this holy and deeply devotional exercise? Is there anything in the nature of prayer that is calculated to create disgust? Is prayer so hostile and ruinous to real enjoyment, that a man must approach the mercy-seat with as much reluctance as a fool goes to the correction of the stocks? Does prayer possess no attractions? Does it promise no pleasures? Does it create no enjoyments? So far from this being the case, you cannot conceive of a happier creature upon earth than a praying man; one who draws near to God, and who feels that God draws near to him. "A man on earth devoted to the skies," who walks with God, and rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

"Prayer ardent opens heaven, lets down a stream
Of glory on the consecrated hour
Of man in audience with the Deity."

"Prayer is good for all things that are good, and good against all things that are evil." If you have no disposition to pray, you must pray for a disposition. The neglect or omission of a duty can never fit you for the performance of it; for in proportion as you omit to pray, so will the reluctance you feel towards it increase, until you have lost all the spirit and power of prayer, and you are given over to a reprobate mind to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you

do not love to pray because you find no pleasure in it. And can this be a reason why you should neglect to pray? Must the duties of religion be omitted because you find no pleasure in the performance of them? Are you not to mortify the deeds of the body, to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, to deny yourself, and to take up your cross daily and to follow Christ; and to do many things which are far more painful than pleasurable to perform? And if you do not love to pray, it is a proof that you do not love God, that you have no desire to love him, that your hearts are estranged from him, and that his service is a weariness to you. Then what a wretched state must your souls be in! How unfit are you to die! You cannot go to heaven, because you cannot have a preparation for it without prayer. Salvation is only promised to prayer; it is not attainable but through the use of prayer; and it is granted only to perseverance in prayer. He, therefore, who obstinately refuses to pray, can have no pretensions to salvation. And were it possible for you to be admitted into heaven, you would feel as great an antipathy to its employments as you now do to the duties of religion. For if the heavenly inhabitants never pray, never ask blessings from the hands of their great Creator, yet they are endlessly employed in anthems of

praise for the blessings they enjoy; and those who feel a dislike to prayer will be equally disinclined to praise, which forms no inconsiderable part of prayer.

A third class of persons excuse themselves from praying by pleading the want of time. You are men of business, and diligence in business you deem the most important part of your duty. You have large and expensive families, who are dependent on your exertions for a maintenance; and the cultivation of your farms, or the cares of your business, so fully engage your attention, that you have no time to pray. Or you occupy a subordinate situation in society; you are obliged to labour for your daily bread; and you ask, how can it be expected that you should be able to find time to pray? But remember that prayer is the first duty of man; the first in order, and the first in importance; and therefore it claims the precedence of every other duty. "Seek *first*," said our Saviour, "the kingdom of God." "I love them that love me," saith the Lord; "and those who seek me early shall find me." Remember, he who has no time to pray has no time to be a Christian; for Christ spent whole nights on the cold ground in prayer; and he hath left us an example that we should tread in his steps. He who has no time to pray has no time to obey God; since

God commands us to pray, and to pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting. He who has no time to pray has no time to be happy, no time to answer the end of his creation, and no time to be saved. But have you really no time to pray? O think again! Can you abstract no time from your hours of business, from your pleasures, from your sleep, to entreat God to have mercy upon you, to pardon your sins, and to fit you for heaven? O what time is wasted in vain and foolish conversation, in dress, in idleness, in doing nothing, or something worse than nothing! What would you think of a criminal condemned to die, who would say he had no time to ask pardon of his judge, when he knew that pardon might be obtained if he sued for it? or of a famishing man who would say that he had no time to ask for food, or to stretch out his hand to receive it, when it was offered to him? Even if your daily avocations pressed so heavily upon you as to leave you but little time for closet devotions, yet you should recollect that prayer is a mental exercise; it is the pouring out of the heart before God: and this may be done anywhere; in the house, in the street, in solitude, or in society; for God is essentially present in every place; and our prayers and our souls may find their way to him from the remotest bounds of the habitable world.

Others, who neglect prayer, seek to excuse themselves from all blame, by asking, "Why should we pray? Does not God know all our wants? Must we use a multitude of words to explain them to him? Can we inform God of any thing that he does not know? And is he not immutable? Will our prayers produce any change in the divine mind? Can he be more willing to grant us his favours after we have prayed, than he was before?" In answer to questions of this nature, it may be said, God, the supreme and eternal Potentate, has peremptorily enjoined the practice of prayer. This is a doctrine of revelation. God has promised to hear prayer. This is a truth equally obvious. God justly withholds blessings from those who never pray, which he graciously grants to those who do. This also is so evident as to need no proof. And with these simple and indisputable truths in our possession, we cannot fail to see the expediency and the necessity of prayer. We may not be able to comprehend how it operates to produce the effects attributed to it; but if we postpone prayer because we cannot explain every thing that appertains to it, we may with equal propriety decline eating, because we cannot understand the process of digestion, or explain how the food we eat nourishes and invigorates the body. All we have to do with God's com-

mandments is, to understand and obey them. "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." To question their propriety is not our province. It is not for us to say unto God, "What doest thou?" "He giveth not account of any of his matters" unto us. His will is the unchangeable and eternal rule of rectitude; therefore, with the Psalmist, we should esteem all God's "precepts concerning all things to be right." And though we cannot always discover the reasons of the divine conduct, yet we must

"Confess the' Almighty just,
And where we can't unriddle, learn to trust."

Another class of persons will be ready to say, "We have prayed, but we have not received any answers to our prayers; the blessings which we have sought, we have not found; and we therefore think it is useless to continue to pray." But God is not obliged to give you all that you ask at his hands. You may pray for things which it would be disadvantageous for you to possess. St. James mentions those who asked for blessings which they meant to consume upon their lusts. God, in mercy, crosseth inordinate desires. Disappointments are frequently blessings. Sinners cannot have worse judgments

inflicted upon them, than the gratification of their own desires. Rachel said, "Give me children, or else I die." She had her desire granted, but death was the consequence. But perhaps you have prayed for spiritual blessings, and have not received them; and you think it is useless to continue to pray. But have you asked in an acceptable manner? Are you sincerely desirous of obtaining the blessings for which you pray? David mentions a prayer that "goeth not out of feigned lips;" that is, where the language of the lips is expressive of the feelings and sentiments of the heart. Feigned prayers are fruitless prayers. "O what abundance of wretches," says Baxter, "do offer up hypocritical mock-prayers unto God! blaspheming him thereby as if he were an idol, and knew not their hypocrisy, and searched out their hearts! Alas! how commonly do men pray in public that the rest of their lives hereafter may be pure and holy, that hate purity and holiness in their hearts, and deride and oppose that which they seem to pray for! as Austin confesseth of himself before he was converted, that he prayed against his besetting sin, and yet was afraid lest God should answer his prayers." The prophet complained of the people of Israel, that "they flattered God with their mouth, and lied unto him with their

tongue; for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant."

But if your prayers are not answered, is there not a cause? And can you for a moment imagine that God is unable or unwilling to grant you the blessings for which you pray? Unable he cannot be, for power belongeth unto God; power that no creature can resist, and of which no man can conceive. "I am," saith he, "the Almighty God." And is he less willing than he is able to answer prayer? Is not his benevolence equal to his power? Can He who is loving to every man, who hateth nothing that he hath made, but who is rich in mercy to all who call upon him, be unwilling to answer your prayers? No; your want of success in prayer is attributable, not to God, but to yourselves. You may individually adopt the language of the poet, and say,

"The hind'rance must be all in me,
It cannot in my Saviour be,
Witness that streaming blood."

O examine yourselves! Look into your hearts, and inquire, Have you given up your sins? Remember what David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." God heareth not sinners; wilful, impenitent sinners. The indulgence of sin

presents an insuperable obstacle to the success of your prayers. O cease from doing evil; put away iniquity far from your tabernacle; watch against all the encroachments of sin; resist every temptation to it; keep your hearts with all diligence; and say, when enticed to sin, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

But perhaps you are seeking to justify your slothfulness by saying, "We are poor sinful creatures, and can do nothing of ourselves; and unless God give us grace, we have no power to pray." And will you dare to insult God by insinuating that he has withheld grace from you? Will you seek to exonerate yourselves of all blame by casting it on your Maker? Will you say, with the unprofitable servant, "I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed?" Does God peremptorily command you to pray, and yet refuse to grant you the needful aid for the performance of this duty? And will you arraign the Judge of all the earth at your bar? and in effect say, "We have done our best: better we would have done, had we been able; more we would have prayed, had we the power; but the merciful, the benevolent, the ever-blessed God, who hath sent his Son into the world that the world

through him might be saved, expects more of us than we can possibly perform?" But suffer me to ask, What do you desire God to do for you that he has not done? and what grace do you expect at his hands, that he has not imparted to you? Are you so infatuated as to imagine that the grace of God will supersede the necessity of human exertion? Do you expect that grace will render works unnecessary? Will it operate as irresistibly as wind or water acts upon machinery? Under its influence, do you think that you will have no cross to take up, no corrupt affection to mortify, no right hand to cut off, no right eye to pluck out, no old man to crucify? Grace helps us in time of need; and it is sufficient for all our need. But while God worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure, we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. If God's grace acted violently and irresistibly, if it destroyed all the principles of nature, moral agency would be driven out of the world; reward and punishment would become ridiculous; as the only reason why men did good would be, that God forced them to do it; and the only reason why they did evil would be, because they had no ability to do better.

To you who neglect prayer altogether, I would say, Suffer the word of exhortation.

Considering the importance, the reasonableness, and the advantages of prayer, one could hardly suppose, if well-known facts did not remove all doubt, that any such beings as yourselves could be found in existence; that men so lost to virtue, so utterly devoid of all reverence for their Maker, and so hostile to all that is good, should be allowed to live. That God is grieved at your conduct; that his wrath is revealed from heaven against you; that he has power sufficient to punish you; and that punishment must inevitably be your portion, if you continue in sin; are truths that admit of no controversy. But the Lord bears with you; he not only permits you to live, but he takes care of your persons; he supplies your wants, he pities your ignorance, and beseeches you to be reconciled to him. And will you for all this profusion of kindness, treat him with contempt? Will you continue to rebel against him? Will you exclude him from your thoughts? If you live without prayer, you are practical Atheists. It is in vain that you allow there is a God, when you live as if there were none. O begin to pray; delay no longer; do not say in your hearts that you cannot pray. You can, you must, pray, or perish. Your state is fearful beyond description; but though imminently perilous, it is not utterly hopeless: but if you persist

in restraining prayer before God, it will shortly be without remedy. If you will not now seek to know the things that belong unto your peace, they will shortly be hidden from your eyes. To you, and to every obstinate, incorrigible sinner, God will, ere long, say, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me."

ON SOCIAL PRAYER.

CHAPTER I.

SOCIAL PRAYER ILLUSTRATED.

MAN is a social creature: the love of society is essential to his existence; and in it he breathes as in his genial element.

“Man in society is like a flower
Blown in its native bed; 'tis there alone
His faculties, expanded in full bloom,
Shine out; there only reach their proper use.”

That solitude has its charms and its advantages must be allowed. It is peculiarly favourable to religious meditation, to scientific research, to intellectual improvement, to self-examination, and to intercourse with heaven; but as we are indebted to society for the protection of our persons and property, for our domestic comforts, our wholesome laws, and civil institutions, and for many of our religious privileges, we are bound, according to the best of our ability, to promote the welfare of those with whom it is

our lot to live. And among other means by which we may benefit society, we notice especially that of prayer.

In considering the character of social prayers, we mention, as the first in order, prayers with, and for, our families. The world is composed of families, as the ocean is of drops; and there are few persons in existence who have not some known family connexions, sympathies, and attachments. The members of families include children, parents, servants, and visitors; for all of whom daily prayers should be offered. In families where there are many children, some will be found who are too young to pray; for prayer is no less the work of the mind than of the heart; of the understanding, than of the affections; and though you may, and ought to, instruct little children to lisp the language and utter the sentiments of prayer, yet until their understandings begin to expand, so as to be enabled to know good from evil, they will be incapable of praying. The mind of an infant is a perfect blank; without knowledge or discernment, or even conscious existence. But though a child may be too young to pray, yet he is not too young to sin, nor too young to die; for the power of sinning precedes the power of praying. The Psalmist, speaking of children, says, "They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking

lies." They therefore need the prayers of parents; for prayers offered up in their hearing, and on their behalf, are not only eminently calculated to instruct and excite them to pray for themselves, but are also the most effectual means of drawing down the blessing of God upon their heads.

Some, who are heads of families, seek to excuse themselves from praying with them, by pleading their inability to pray extemporally. But to meet the wants and wishes of such persons, forms of prayer for families are composed and published, of which they may avail themselves. Not that we think a form of prayer equally excellent with the gift of prayer; any more than the reading of a pre-composed sermon is equal to the gift of preaching. On this subject Bishop Wilkins, in his discourse concerning the gift of prayer, says, "For any one so to set down and satisfy himself with his book-prayer, or some prescript form, as to go no farther, this were still to remain in his infancy, and not to grow up in his new nature. This would be as if a man who had *once* need of crutches should *always* afterwards make use of them, and so necessitate himself to a continual impotence. 'Tis the duty of every Christian to grow and increase in all the parts of Christianity, as well *gifts* as *graces*; to exercise and improve

every holy gift; and not to stifle any of those abilities wherewith God has endowed them. Now how can a man be said to live suitably unto those rules who does not put forth himself in some attempts and endeavours of this kind? And then, besides, how can such a man suit his desires unto his several emergencies? What one says of *counsel* to be had from books may be fitly applied to this *prayer* by book; that 'tis commonly of itself something flat and dead, floating for the most part too much in *generalities*, and not *particular* enough for each several occasion. There is not that life and vigour in it to engage the affections as when it proceeds immediately from the soul itself, and is the natural expression of those particulars whereof we are most sensible." "And if it be a fault not to strive and labour after this gift, much more is it to jeer and despise it by the name of *extempore prayer*, and praying *by the Spirit*; which expressions are, for the most part, a sign of a profane heart, and such as are altogether strangers from the power and comfort of this duty."

Nor are children the only persons who need the prayers of parents or heads of families. There are servants, and frequently visiters, who form the family circle, and are as ignorant of God as children. For their sakes, also, family

prayer should be maintained. The value and variety of the benefits which result from thus setting up the worship of God in our families are known only to Him with whom we have to do. A credible historian tells us, that, about a century ago, there was an earthquake in Switzerland, by which a part of a mountain was thrown down; and it fell upon a village that stood under it, and crushed every house and inhabitant to pieces,—except the corner of one cottage, where the master of the house, with his poor family, were found together praying to God. It is true, indeed, that the families of the wicked sometimes prosper; but their prosperity is a snare and a curse to them. “A pious tradesman conversing with a minister on family worship, related the following instructive circumstance concerning himself:—“When I first began business for myself, I was determined, through grace, to be particularly conscientious with respect to family prayer. Accordingly, I persevered for many years in the delightful practice of domestic worship. Morning and evening every individual of my family was ordered always to be present; nor would I allow my apprentices to be absent on any account. In a few years the advantages of these engagements appeared manifestly conspicuous: the blessings of the upper and the nether springs

followed me; health and happiness attended my family, and prosperity my business. At length, such was my rapid increase in trade, and the necessity of devoting every possible moment to my customers, that I began to think whether family prayer did not occupy too much of our time in the morning. Pious scruples arose respecting my intentions of relinquishing this part of my duty; but at length worldly interest prevailed so far, as to induce me to excuse the attendance of my apprentices; and not long after, it was deemed advisable, for the eager prosecution of our business, to make the prayer with my wife when we arose in the morning, suffice for the day. Notwithstanding the repeated checks of conscience that followed this base omission, the calls of a flourishing concern, and the prospect of an increasing family, appeared so imperious and commanding, that I found an easy excuse for this fatal evil, especially as I did not omit prayer altogether. My conscience was now almost seared with a hot iron; when it pleased the Lord to awaken me by a singular providence.

“One day I received a letter from a young man who had formerly been my apprentice, previous to my omitting family prayer. Not doubting but I continued domestic worship, his letter was chiefly on this subject. It was couched

in the most affectionate and respectful terms; but judge of my surprise and confusion when I read these words: ‘O my dear master, never, never, shall I be able sufficiently to thank you for the precious privilege with which you indulged me in your family devotions. O Sir! eternity will be too short to praise my God for what I learned there. It was there, that I first knew the way of salvation, and that I first beheld my lost and wretched state as a sinner; and there that I first experienced the preciousness of Christ in me the hope of glory. O Sir! permit me to say, Never, never neglect those precious engagements. You have yet a family, and more apprentices: may your house be the birth-place of their souls!’ I could read no farther: every line flashed condemnation in my face. I trembled; I shuddered; I was alarmed at the blood of my children and apprentices, that I apprehended were soon to be demanded at my soul-murdering hands.

“Filled with confusion, and bathed in tears, I fled for refuge in secret. I spread the letter before God. I agonized, and—but you can better conceive, than I can describe, my feelings. Suffice it to say, that light broke in upon my disconsolate soul, and a sense of blood-bought pardon was obtained. I immediately flew to my family, presented them be-

fore the Lord; and from that day to the present, I have been and am determined, through grace, that, whenever business becomes too large to prevent family prayer, I will give up the superfluous part of my business, and retain my devotion. Better to lose a few shillings, than become the deliberate murderer of my family, and the instrument of ruin to my own soul."

The next in order for whom, and with whom, prayers should be offered, is the church of the living God. The church of God is composed of Christian believers throughout the world; men who have repented of their sins, and who have obtained mercy by believing in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are represented in the Scriptures as God's husbandry; as God's vineyard; and as God's building; being lively stones, built up a spiritual house, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ; and built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. The members of God's church are designated by various names; belonging to different parties; espousing, on minor points, divers opinions; but all holding the Head, and all looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. On behalf of the ministers of God's church, prayers should be offered by all believers. These need our prayers; for

they are men of like passions with ourselves. They have the same common infirmities; are attacked by the same enemies; are liable to the same dangers; and, by virtue of their elevated office and situation, are exposed to peculiar trials. We should therefore pray that they may be men divinely called and eminently qualified for the work of the Christian ministry; that they may speak boldly, as they ought to speak; keeping back nothing that is profitable to their hearers; but declaring the whole counsel of God with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; warning the unruly, comforting the feeble-minded, supporting the weak, and being patient towards all men. And prayers should be especially offered unto the great Head of the church, that their ministry may be crowned with eminent success; that much people may be added unto the Lord through their instrumentality. And let us not think this an unnecessary or superfluous service; seeing the apostle St. Paul, eminently as he was qualified for the office of the Christian ministry, earnestly solicited the prayers of his Christian brethren. Writing to the Hebrews, he says, "Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." And to the Thessalonians he says, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as

it is with you." And to the Colossians, after having exhorted them to "continue in prayer," he adds, "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds."

The members of the church should also pray for each other; that they may earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. There is the doctrine of faith, as well as the grace of faith; the object as well as the act: and the latter can be influential only as the former is genuine. Where the foundation is false, the fabric must fall. Almost as soon as a Christian church was established upon earth, the subtlety of the devil was employed in seeking to subvert the faith upon which it was founded. False doctrines and antichristian opinions were extensively propagated; and there were those who cast off their first faith, and made shipwreck of faith, and put away a good conscience. The apostles spoke of such persons in terms of unqualified censure and condemnation; and they used a variety of cautions and admonitions to guard the primitive believers against the insidious seductions of men of corrupt minds, who were reprobate concerning the faith. And if in the primitive and purest ages of Christianity the doctrine of faith could not be preserved inviolate

by men who were divinely inspired to propagate it, and who could work miracles for its confirmation; can we reasonably expect, in these latter days, to escape the contagion of false doctrine? The fashion of the present age is notoriously sceptical; profane indifference assumes the name of candour; and, among a certain class of professors, faith is nothing and morality every thing: if a man's life, it is said, be right, his faith cannot be wrong. As if a corrupt faith could produce a correct life; or men could gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles; or error could generate truth. Never was it more needful for the members of the Christian church to be on their guard against deceitful workers, and to pray that they may be saved from the power of seducing spirits, than it is at present. Never was error decked out in more fascinating attire. Never was poison made more palatable to the taste, than it is in modern compositions. Sentiments derogatory to the person, work, and honour of Jesus Christ, subversive of sound evangelical morality, and hostile to the whole spirit of revealed religion, are disseminated with an industry worthy of a better cause. Therefore, as the church is the pillar and ground of the truth; as it is there that the truth is deposited; let its members keep that which is committed to their trust, and pray that they

may be "sound in faith, in charity, and in patience."

In addition to this, they should also pray that the genuineness of their faith may be evinced by the uprightness and consistency of their conduct. "Faith," saith St. James, "without works is dead, being alone." "These things," saith St. Paul to Titus, "I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." Nothing was more strenuously insisted on by the apostles, in their directions to the primitive Christians, than evangelical consistency. They were exhorted to walk as children of the light; to be in their behaviour as becometh holiness; to follow peace with all men; and by well-doing, to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. He who neglects to walk as Christ walked, belies his profession; he is no better than a hypocrite, a public dissembler, an enemy to evangelical religion; and through him Christianity is brought into disrepute, and Christ is wounded in the house of his friends. And it should never be forgotten that the church and the world form two distinct societies, whose views, habits, principles, and conduct are hostile to each other. Of the Jewish church it was said, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and

shall not be reckoned among the nations.” “And this people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.” And as an evidence that the Christian church possesses the same character of separation from the world, the following divinely inspired admonitions are recorded:—“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.” “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.” “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” But this separation from the world was not a sanctimonious or a hypocritical singularity; it was not engendered by vanity or self-conceit; it was not that arrogant pretension to superior sanctity which said, “Stand by thyself, come not near to me, I am holier than thou.” The members of primitive churches had their conversation in the world; they mixed promiscuously in human society; they worked with their own hands that they might provide things honest in the sight of all men, and give to him that needed. They bought, and sold, and were diligent in business, and wrought with labour and travail, night and day. “These hands,” saith St. Paul, “have ministered unto my necessities, and unto them who were with me.” But they held no unnecessary intercourse with the world; they chose

not the men of the world for their companions; the friendship of this world they held to be enmity with God; and conformity to the world they invariably discountenanced, both by precept and example. And this separation from worldly society may be traced to a most legitimate and powerfully operative cause: it grew out of that moral and soul-transforming change which had been effected in them. They were "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." And though they were in the world, yet they were not of the world. Some of them had previously walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries, but they had turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and their former besotted companions, wholly ignorant of that divine transformation, by which they were made new creatures in Christ Jesus, thought it strange that they continued not to run with them into the same excess of riot.

The members of the church should also pray that they may be united in the bonds of Christian charity and brotherly love. It is a lamentable thing that there should be so much bigotry, bitterness, and party feeling among Christians of different persuasions. In the

present imperfect state of human society, there will necessarily be men of different views. We cannot all think alike on any subject; we have not all equal capacities for examining the truth; nor have we all equal opportunities. The great Head of the church has wisely permitted this diversity of opinion to exist. Jesus Christ is the Prince of peace, and of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end; his last legacy to his disciples was his peace: the church is the region of peace; and all its members are bound to live in peace with each other, that the God of love and peace may be with them.

In addition to this, the members of the Christian church should pray for the extension and establishment of the kingdom of Christ among men. This must be accomplished by accessions to the number of Gospel ministers. For whatever moral changes are effected in the world, the ministers of Christ are the appointed instruments for their accomplishment. If the wilderness become a fruitful field, it is by them that the fallow ground is broken up, the precious seed sown; and it is they that will return with rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. If the strong holds of sin are to be pulled down, and the fortresses of the enemy destroyed, it is they who must wield the weapons of the Gospel

warfare, and carry the battle to the gate. If sinners are to be reconciled unto God, the ambassadors of Christ must be charged with the messages of mercy and the ministry of reconciliation. And wherever God has revived his work, and extended the knowledge of his name, it has been by the instrumentality of his ministers. Referring to the latter days, the prophet says, "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;" and our Lord declared, "that the Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." "The harvest," said our Saviour, "truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." The members of the Christian church should also pray for extraordinary effusions of the Holy Ghost, to give efficacy to the word of his grace. The wonderful effects produced by St. Peter's sermon at the feast of Pentecost cannot be attributed to any peculiar or exclusive excellency appertaining to the doctrine which he preached, nor to the manner of his stating it; but to the power of the divine Spirit, which accompanied the ministration of the word: and the success of the Gospel must ever depend upon his agency. It is only when the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, that the

wilderness will become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. We are entitled to believe, from the prophetical Scriptures, that glorious manifestations of the Spirit will be made to the church in the latter period of the world. "I will pour," saith the Lord, "water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thy offspring. I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." Prayer should, therefore, be made without ceasing by the church, that the kingdom of God may come, that his Spirit may be poured out upon all flesh, and that his word may have free course and be glorified. This duty requires no sacrifice but that of apathy, no funds but those of piety and benevolence, and no talents but such as believers universally possess. And there is no way by which Christians in a private capacity can so effectually promote the work of God, and advance the kingdom of Christ among men, as by fervent and importunate prayer. For the most eminent effusions of the Spirit that we read of in the Scriptures were not only afforded to prayer, but they appear to have taken place at the very time that this exercise was performed.

Besides praying for the church, that it may be so established that the gates of hell may

never prevail against it, we should pray for our country. As Britons, our country ought to be peculiarly dear to us. May we not adopt the language of the Psalmist, and say of God, "He hath not dealt so with any nation?" Where are there any people upon the face of the earth who possess advantages equal to ours? Let us think of our holy sabbaths, of our houses for public worship, of our Gospel ministers, of our Christian privileges, of our benevolent institutions, of our Stranger's Friend societies, of our infirmaries, our hospitals, and other public buildings, where relief is afforded to the outcasts, and where the suffering sons of humanity are pitied and provided for. But privileged as we are, yet how shamefully are our privileges desecrated and abused! We are "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers." "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it." From the peasant to the peer, and through all the intermediate grades of society among us, vice most alarmingly prevails. It is difficult to enumerate any act of criminality of which a human creature can be guilty, that is not perpetrated by some portions of our population. Who that seriously considers the moral condition of our nation, does not perceive how much we need

the prayers of God's elect, who cry day and night unto him?

To be particular, we should pray for our queen, that God may protect her person, preserve her health, and continue her life; and that her government may long be a public blessing to our country; that her throne may be established in righteousness, and upheld with mercy; that her enemies may be clothed with shame, but upon herself that her crown may flourish. And we should pray for the succession in the Protestant line; that the entail of the crown may prove a successful expedient for the establishment of peace and truth in our days, securing them to posterity; and that all the machinations and insidious schemes of our Popish adversaries, who are seeking to re-establish the "mystery of iniquity" among us, "the Lord" may "consume with the Spirit of his mouth," and destroy "with the brightness of his coming."

We should also pray for our privy-counsellors, the ministers of state, the members of parliament, and all that are employed in the administration of our public affairs: that God may counsel our counsellors, and teach our senators wisdom; that he may give them a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, to make them of quick understanding in the fear

of the Lord : “ that all things may be so ordered and settled, by their endeavours, upon the best and surest foundations, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations.” And we should also pray, that our magistrates and judges, and those who rule over us, may be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord ; ever remembering that they judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with them in judgment : that they may be able men, fearing God, and hating covetousness ; that judgment may run down like a river, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

We should also pray for our public schools and seminaries of learning ; that our children and youths may be religiously educated, and trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ; and that those who are appointed to instruct them may have a right judgment in all things, and be examples of piety and holy living to such as are placed under their care.

And we should pray especially for the common people of the land ; that they may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty ; that our trade may flourish, and our commerce be widely and industriously extended ; that the labouring classes of our community may have uninterrupted employment, and have the necessities and conveniences of life, as the recom-

pence of their daily toils; that neither the hire of the labourers, who reap down our fields, nor the wages of the artisans, who work in our factories, may be kept back by the fraud or avarice of their employers; that those families who now pine with hunger, and creep into the sordid hut of cheerless poverty, destitute, afflicted, and forsaken, may have all their wants supplied by the charity of their affluent neighbours; and that God may make the "poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him."

Finally, we should pray for the world; that Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Pagans may all be brought to a knowledge of the truth; and that the ends of the earth may see the salvation of God. The restricted progress of Christianity, and the moral darkness in which so large a portion of the globe has remained, notwithstanding the Sun of Righteousness has arisen, and the Desire of all nations has appeared, forms one of the most mysterious dispensations of Providence which has ever occupied human attention. "As to the state of the world," says a late writer, "the number of its inhabitants is, I believe, generally supposed to be about eight hundred millions. The situation of the countries which all these beings inhabit, the degree of civilization to which they have attained, their

languages, their literature, their manners and customs, the climate, soil, and productions of each of these countries, and a great variety of other circumstances connected with the present existence of these millions, have been, to a certain extent, ascertained." But what is their spiritual condition? "Five hundred millions," says the same writer, "it is notorious, remain, to this hour, Pagan idolaters; and one hundred millions more are the followers of the impostor Mahomet. Two hundred millions only are left wearing the Christian name." And if we deduct all those who have the form of godliness only, but are destitute of its power, it is to be feared that we shall not leave more than one in four who appears to be acting under the influence of Christian principles. "We have, then, less than fifty millions of real Christians on earth at any given time; and all the rest, seven hundred and fifty millions, are living and dying without God in the world! And this is not of the worst, but of the best, period of time, next the days of the apostles." "Perhaps there never existed more good men on earth at any one time than there are at present; and yet this leaves more than fifteen out of sixteen of the human race unacquainted with the salvation which is in Christ Jesus; and this havoc made by sin and death has continued, without inter-

ruption, day by day and hour by hour, through all the ages since the fall."

But fearful and appalling as this retrospect is, we know from the prophetic Scriptures that the world will not always continue in this awfully degraded and ruinous condition. A great and glorious change will take place in its civilized and moral state. God, by Isaiah, declares, "All flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." And by the prophet Jeremiah, God saith, "This is the covenant that I will make in those days, saith the Lord: I will put my law in their inward parts, and will write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know ye the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least even unto the greatest; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." And by the prophet Habakkuk, it is said, "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." The world shall be as full of this knowledge as the channels of the sea are with water; so extensively will it spread, and so widely will it diffuse its influence. And every kind of knowledge that can be at all beneficial to man in his present probationary state

of existence will be induced in its train. For the progression of knowledge has been constant in every country where Christianity has prevailed. There reason shines with a more radiant lustre; science walks with a steadier step; justice holds a more even balance; and friendship lends a more soothing hand. And in proportion as Christianity becomes triumphant, ignorance and error will cease to exist. Then a most happy and peaceful state of society will be introduced and perpetuated; then gratitude shall bound in every bosom, joy sparkle in every eye, benevolence breathe in every breast, and universal love fill the earth. Thus Isaiah, in that prophetic and figurative description which he furnishes of the universal harmony that shall reign in the world under the Messiah's peaceful dominion, when men of fierce, lion-like, and wolfish dispositions shall become meek and pacific as the lamb, adds, as the reason for this astonishing change, "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

Let us pray, then, in the language which our Saviour has taught us to use, "Thy kingdom come." Let the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and may he reign for ever and ever. Let the rejected Jews be recovered to the faith of Christ, and all Israel be saved, and the fulness of the

Gentiles be gathered in; that there may be one fold and one Shepherd.

But let us carefully guard against all discrepancy between our prayers and our practice. We can contribute towards the furtherance of some objects only by our prayers; but for the accomplishment of others, efforts must be added. We pray with and for our families; but, in addition to this, we must instruct, admonish, and govern them. I was once on terms of great intimacy with a good man, who is now with God, and, in the course of conversation, having reminded him of the distinguished honour which the Lord had put upon him in giving him a son who was then a successful missionary in the foreign field, he said, "Yes, but he was once a great grief to me: he grew up to manhood without having the fear of God before his eyes. One day, while wrestling with God on his behalf, I had such a persuasion in my mind that my prayer was heard, that I could do nothing but rejoice. But," said he, "for some time, seeing no perceptible change take place in his conduct, I was disappointed, and I went again to God; and then the thought occurred to me, 'You must converse with him.' I did so; and my conversation, by the blessing of God, was made effectual to his salvation, and he is now seeking to save others."

We pray for the good estate of the catholic church, “that the righteousness thereof” may “go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.” But to maintain a consistency of character, we must seek to promote the interests of the church, by uniting ourselves with some section of it; making a public profession of Christianity; walking in wisdom towards them that are without; and adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

If we pray for our country, and yet omit to seek its good,—neglect to support its benevolent institutions, to discountenance the violation of its laws, and to reprove the sins of its inhabitants,—how justly may the sincerity of our prayers be questioned!

If we pray that the Lord may make known his salvation, and that his righteousness may be openly showed in the sight of the heathen, and yet make it a matter of indifference whether a vast proportion of the globe should live heathens, or die Christians; if we pray that the knowledge of the Lord may cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea, yet act as if we were indifferent whether Christianity ended as well as began at home; if we pray that the sound may go out into all lands, and the words unto the ends of the world, and yet are satisfied to

keep the sound within our own hearing, and the words within our own island; is not this a prayer which goeth out of feigned lips? When we pray, that God's "will may be done," we know that His will is, that "all should be saved, and that not one should perish." When, therefore, we assist in sending the Gospel to the dark and distant corners of the earth, then, and not till then, may we consistently desire of God in our prayers, that his saving health may be known to all nations. For we must vindicate the veracity of our prayers by our exertions, and extend its efficiency by our influence.

CHAPTER II.

REASONS WHY MEN SHOULD PRAY WITH AND FOR
EACH OTHER.

SOCIAL prayer, or, in other words, prayer with and for each other, should be offered up to God, because the Scriptures enjoin and sanction it. The Bible is our rule of faith and practice; it instructs us in what we are to believe, and it directs us what we are to do. It is a rule divine in its origin, circumstantial in its character, practicable in its requirements, and inviolable and unchangeable in its nature. And by this rule we are bound to walk: we are to practise what it enjoins, and we are to avoid what it prohibits. Now that we are bound to pray with and for each other will appear from a consideration of the following scriptures:—"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." And that our Saviour sanctioned social prayer will appear from his own words: "I say unto you, that if

two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." In addition to this, our Lord's prayer was certainly designed especially for social worship. "When *ye* pray, say, *Our* Father; give *us* this day *our* daily bread, and forgive *us our* trespasses; and lead *us* not into temptation." When Zacharias was executing the priest's office "before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense."

It is only on the principle that men have been accustomed from time immemorial to pray with and for each other, that public buildings have been erected, and set apart for this social and devout exercise. Hence the Jews had their oratories, "not erected," says Hooker, "in any sumptuous or stately manner, which had been perilous in regard of the world's envy towards them:" but plain and simple in their construction. "Do not," says Bishop Taylor, "omit thy prayers, for want of a good *oratory* or place to pray in; nor thy duty, for want of temporal encouragements." "In addition to

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this, the Jews," says Mede, "besides their *tabernacle*, or *temple*, which was the only place for sacrifice, had first or last two sorts of places for religious duties, the one called *proseuchæ*, the other synagogues. The difference between which was this: *proseucha* was a plot of ground encompassed with a wall, or some other like mound or enclosure, and open above; much like to our courts: the use properly for prayer, as the name *proseucha* importeth. A synagogue was *ædificium tectum*, a covered edifice, as our houses and churches are; where the law and prophets were read and expounded, and the people instructed in divine matters; according to Acts xv. 21, where it is said, 'Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath-day.' From whence also you may gather that synagogues were within the cities, as *proseuchæ* were without; which was another difference between them."

It was, in all probability, one of those places that is referred to in the Acts of the Apostles, where the sacred writer says, "And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women that resorted thither." "Probably," says Dr. Clarke, "this was before the time of their public wor-

ship; and while they were waiting for the assembling of the people in general; and Paul improved the opportunity to speak concerning Christ and his salvation to the women that resorted thither." And that this was not the only exercise in which they engaged, we learn from a subsequent verse, where it is said, "As we went to prayer, a certain damsel met us, which brought her masters much gain by sooth-saying." In addition to all their other buildings for devotional purposes, the Jews had their splendid temple; which was said to be a house of prayer for all people. Hence we read, "Two men went up into the temple to pray;" and, "Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour." But social prayer was not confined exclusively to the temple; for when St. Paul took his leave of the Ephesian elders, Acts xx., "He kneeled down, and prayed with them all; and they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him." And in the following chapter, when he departed from Tyre, the brethren there "brought us," says he, "on our way, with wives, and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed." From the preceding texts it will be seen that social prayer is sanctioned by the Scriptures; and this, were there no other reason to be

assigned, should induce us to pray with and for one another.

That social prayer forms a part of our duty, will further appear when we consider ourselves members of civil society. We are all branches of one great family, and consequently there is a mutual relation subsisting between us. Where can we find a human being to whom we are not related, and who may not say to us, "Am I not a man and a brother?" "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?" God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." "The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them all." And besides this, we are, in a subordinate sense, and to a certain extent, dependent on each other for our continued existence. "The profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served by the field." On some we are dependent for our bread; on others for our apparel; on others for our habitations; and on others for our defence. We do not exist as solitary, but as social, beings. And from a consideration of the mutual relation that subsists between us, and the dependence which we have upon each other, we see the obligation we are under to consult each other's welfare. And can we do this more effectually than by prayer? Do we derive benefits from our con-

nexion with society, and shall we not pray for those who contribute to our personal and domestic comfort? Do they minister to our temporal wants, and shall we not in return ask God to supply their spiritual necessities? In many cases, all that we possibly can do to meliorate the misery, and increase the happiness, of mankind, is to commend them to God by prayer and supplication. And he who neglects to do this gives the most palpable proof, if not that he is a direct enemy to his species, yet that it is a matter of perfect indifference with him whether they be happy or miserable, and whether their souls be saved or lost. Nor is it possible for us to discharge our duty to our fellow-creatures, unless we pray for them. We cannot be ignorant of that moral precept that binds us to love one another. "If ye fulfil," saith St. James, "the royal law, according to the Scriptures, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well." It was a question once proposed to Christ, "Who is my neighbour?" We are accustomed to call him only our neighbour whose habitation is contiguous to our own; and we denominate the vicinity of our abode our neighbourhood. Anciently, the Jews deemed no man their neighbour who did not belong to the family of Israel, and who could not call Abraham his father; or at least, who was not proselyted to the Jewish religion,

and instructed in its principles. Nor did they deem themselves obliged to perform any offices of humanity to people of another nation. But the doctrine taught by Christ in the parable of the good Samaritan is, that every man is our neighbour who needs our help, and to whom we can render any assistance, even though he should be an enemy, a heretic, or a heathen. And the love which we are bound to cultivate and evince towards our neighbours, must be measured and estimated by that which we rationally and piously exercise towards ourselves. For as God hath made the love of ourselves to be the rule and standard, the pattern and argument of our love to others, we must infer, that it is such a love of ourselves as is laudable and virtuous, and under wise and righteous regulations. And does not love to ourselves lead us to seek our own good, and to pray for our own salvation? What real or legitimate love can that man have for himself who is too proud, or too lukewarm or lazy, to pray for himself? Genuine self-love is love to our souls; and wherever this exists, prayer will be its never-failing fruit. And as we are commanded to love our neighbours as sincerely and as truly as we love ourselves, we are bound to pray for them as fervently and as piously as we pray for ourselves. Nor must we imagine that we have

discharged our duty unto others, until we have sought their salvation by praying that God may be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities remember no more.

Another motive to induce us to pray with and for others, springs from the reflex influence that this exercise will have upon our personal piety. Social prayer cannot fail to benefit ourselves, as it will tend to keep alive in our hearts those benevolent feelings which it is our duty and interest to cultivate and cherish towards mankind. We all know that there is a large portion of malevolence in the world. How cordially do some men hate one another! With what rancour and fiend-like feelings do they seek to injure each other's reputation, and to ruin each other's souls! Hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, and envyings, abound in almost every department of society; and these lead to slander, defamation, backbiting, and evil-speaking. "The tongue," says the apostle James, "can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison: it setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." And these evils exist not only in the world, but in the church; not only among men whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil, and whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, but among people professedly pious there is a great dearth of that

charity that covereth a multitude of sins; that puts the most favourable construction upon things that are doubtful, and that hides the faults we see, rather than expose them to the gaze of the public. And may not the almost total absence of this charity be traced back to the neglect of social prayer? How can they pray together, how advance the name of their God, or keep in and stir up all grace in one another, unless they be united by love? Pray with and for one another; and the consequence will be, your love towards each other will abound more and more. The very act of prayer will give birth to the principle of love. And in proportion as you pour out your hearts before God on behalf of others, the beneficial effect of your prayers will redound to yourselves. And thus "the liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

But most of all we should pray with and for others, as our prayers may be available for their salvation. God hears the prayers of some on behalf of others. And this is the chief reason on which social prayer is founded. The Scriptures furnish us with the most encouraging statements and facts on this subject. See Abraham interceding with God on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah; and great and grievous as their sin was, and richly as they

had merited the divine indignation, yet God, in answer to the prayers of the father of the faithful, so far condescended as to say, that if only ten righteous persons could be found among them, he would spare the whole of the inhabitants for their sakes. When the wrath of the Almighty was kindled against Job's three friends for not having spoken of him the thing that was right, God said unto them, "My servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept; lest I deal with you after your folly. And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." In consequence of the repeated provocations of the discontented Israelites against God, he seemed fixed to exterminate them as a nation from the earth. "How long," saith God to Moses, "will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." But Moses, full of godly jealousy, and totally regardless of his own reputation, ventured to expostulate with his Maker in the following affecting language: "Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,

Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore hath he slain them in the wilderness. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt until now. And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word." What a splendid proof is this of the power of intercessory prayer! What an evidence of the delight that God takes in putting honour upon it! What a motive to public spiritedness in religion! Here is a whole nation rescued from ruin, and saved from the exterminating pestilence, by the effectual fervent prayer of ONE righteous man. See how ready God is to forgive sin!

"His waken'd wrath doth slowly move,
His willing mercy flies apace."

"Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people," saith Moses: "I have pardoned according to thy word," saith God.

When the children of Israel had added unto all their evils that of asking a king, the Lord, to show his displeasure against them, sent thunder and rain, "that ye may perceive and see," saith he, "that your wickedness is great in asking you a king." They, full of consternation and alarm, ran to Samuel, and said, "Pray for thy

servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not. And Samuel said unto the people, Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." From this we may learn, that the welfare of Israel had previously been the subject of the prophet's prayers; that the withdrawal of their allegiance from God could not alienate the affections of Samuel from them, and that he deemed it a sin against God to cease from praying for them. St. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, exhorts them to make supplications "for all saints." On this subject an ancient writer observes, "This is indeed *the church's treasury*, the common stock of supplications. Paul prayeth for them that had never seen his face: 'God knoweth what conflict I have for you, and for many that have not seen my face in the flesh.' A Christian is a rich merchant, who hath his factors in divers countries; some in all places of the world, that deal for him at the throne of grace; and by this means the members of Christ's body have a communion one with another, though at a distance." In addressing the Romans, St. Paul saith, "Brethren, my heart's desire, and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." And to the same people he says, "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of

the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers." St. James saith, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed: the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Whether this healing refers to the body or the soul, to natural or spiritual diseases, the text serves to show the power of faithful prayer. And in further proof of the availableness of prayer on behalf of others, St. John declares, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death."

Such are the reasons why Christians should be induced to pray with and for one another; and such the motives that should prompt them to intercede with God on behalf of their families, the church, their country, and the world. And to Christian minds, minds thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of godliness, no arguments can be more powerful, no motives more availing, to excite them to the practice of the all-important duty of social prayer. What condescension on the part of God, in allowing men, the work of his own hands, to be co-workers with himself in the most honourable exercise upon earth; that of saving souls from death, and rescuing from the jaws of perdition his immortal offspring! "Thus saith the Lord,"

by the prophet Isaiah, "the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask of me things to come, concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me." For though we must not dare to strive with our Maker by insolent complaints, yet we may wrestle with him by faithful and fervent prayer. See the power of intercession, and its prevalency with God. "Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am." For he is waiting to be gracious; and he in effect says to each individual, what he did to Solomon, "Ask what I shall give thee." God has every thing to give that man can possibly need: but he will be inquired of; we must ask in order to receive. What if God should give to you who are parents the souls of your children, in answer to your prayers! Would it not be to you a source of rich delight, and endless exultation? And there is nothing hypothetical, or even scarcely contingent, in this supposition. For God is never more inclined to hear the prayers of some on behalf of others than when believing parents present their petitions to him for the salvation of their children. How instructive and encouraging is the history of Hannah, and that of her son Samuel! A son, promised in answer to prayer; dedicated to God before he was born; a son, whose very name, to the latest hour of his life, was a stand-

ing memorial of his mother's importunity at the throne of grace: *Samuel*, "asked and given of God." A character superior to Samuel for fervent piety, incorruptible integrity, and public-spirited usefulness, was never exhibited to the world. St. Augustine affords a remarkable example of the prevalence of intercessory prayer. "While I was yet walking in sin," says he, "often attempting to rise, and sinking still deeper, my dear mother Monica, in vigorous hope, persisted in praying for me. She entreated also a certain bishop to undertake to reason me out of my errors. He was a person not backward to attempt this where he found a docile subject. 'But your son,' says he, 'is too much elated at present, and carried away by the pleasing novelties of his opinion, to regard any argument, as appears from the pleasure he takes in perplexing many ignorant persons with his captious questions. Let him alone, only continue praying to the Lord for him: in the course of his study he will discover his error.' All this satisfied not my anxious parent. With floods of tears she persisted in her request, till, a little out of patience by her importunity, he said, 'Begone, woman: it is impossible that a child of such tears should perish.'" The influence of her incessant prayers and tears he further traces. "Thy hand, my God, in the secret of

thy providence, forsook not my soul: day and night the prayers of my mother came up before thee, and thou wroughtest on me in a way marvellous, but in secret." He was in this state of mind when he was persuaded to go to Rome as a teacher of rhetoric. "She strove," said he, "to prevent my going, or would fain have gone with me; but I deceived her, pretending that I only meant to accompany a friend until he should sail. I persuaded her to stay behind; but I that night departed privately, and she remained weeping and praying. Courageous through piety, and following me through sea and land, she at length found me, still hopeless with respect to the discovery of divine truth. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, was charmed with the fervency of her piety. I was delighted with his learning, and the sweetness of his language. I sought for opportunities of conversing with him, but in vain. The state of my mind was now altered: my meditations of thee, my God, were like the attempts of men desirous of awaking, but sinking again into sleep. But thou, with whom are the hearts of all, didst shine on me vehemently. I trembled: I now sought the way of obtaining strength to enjoy thee; but found it not until I had embraced the Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who is God over all, blessed for ever,

calling and saying, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.'" "I determined," says he, "to return to Africa with my mother; and while preparations were making for our departure, we stood in a window facing the east, at the mouth of the Tiber. We conversed on the eternal life of the saints: elevating our spirits, we ascended above the noblest parts of the creation to Thee, by whom all things were made. In that moment the world appeared to us of no value, when my mother said, 'What do I here? One thing only, namely, your conversion, was the object for which I wished to live. My God has given me this in large measure. What do I here?' Five days after she was seized with a fever, of which she died."

The mother of the Rev. John Newton was a pious, experienced Christian. He was her only child, and she made the care of his education almost her whole employment. She stored his memory with many valuable pieces, chapters, and portions of Scripture. And though he departed for a season from her counsels, yet, "when the Lord at length," says he, "opened my eyes, I found great benefit by the recollection of them. Besides, my dear mother often commended me with many prayers and tears to God; and I have no doubt that I reap the fruits of her prayers to this hour."

This list might be easily enlarged to an almost illimitable extent. The number of children that have been brought to God through the prevalency of their parents' prayers exceeds all calculation. And the wondrous power of faithful prayer will never be fully known until that "day for which all other days were made" shall declare it.

CHAPTER III.

ON PUBLIC MEETINGS APPROPRIATED TO SOCIAL PRAYER.

IN addition to the duty of praying with and for our several families, meetings for mutual social prayer should be established in every section of the Christian church. To these meetings the greatest publicity should be given; and persons who are not members of the Christian church, but who attend the ministry of the Gospel, should be earnestly and affectionately invited. For though the preaching of the word is God's great ordinance for the salvation of men, yet prayer should be added, that this word may have free course and be glorified. And that meetings for prayer may be generally profitable, a few directions on the mode of conducting them may not be deemed unnecessary.

First. Let those who take the lead in these meetings, and who are employed in conducting them, and speaking to God on behalf of the people, be persons of eminent piety, and uniform Christian conduct. This is a point of vital importance: too much attention cannot be

paid to it. It is the effectual fervent prayer of a *righteous* man that availeth much. God first accepteth the person, and then the duty. "Them that honour me," saith he, "I will honour." Men who live nearest to God will have most power with him in prayer. To them the spirit of grace and supplication will be most copiously administered; they will feel the tenderest pity and the warmest charity on behalf of the souls for whom they pray. The tones of earnestness, and sincerity, and feeling, will carry an emphasis and an infection with them; and they who speak from the heart will speak to it.

If persons are employed in conducting prayer-meetings, of an immoral or even of a doubtful character, in whom the people have little if any confidence as to their personal piety, they will not only fail to secure the divine blessing, but be the means of exciting prejudice in the minds of the attendants; and thus the progress of religion will be retarded rather than accelerated by their imprudent, not to say pestilential, influence.

Secondly. Let the expressions of those who engage in prayer be in strict accordance with the language of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures. There is nothing that we can need, and for which we are authorized to pray, that is not

revealed in the word of God. And no words can be employed in our prayers that are more acceptable with him than what were used by those divinely-inspired men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The inimitable simplicity of the lively oracles is one of their principal excellencies. And that we may be furnished with expressions adapted to the nature of prayer, let us read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the holy Scriptures; and thus be prepared to speak unto God in his own language. What a variety of phrases and expressions are presented to us in the Psalms which may be suitably and successfully employed in our social devotions! How cold and dead does that prayer appear that is composed in the most elegant language, when it is not heightened by that solemnity of phrase which may be drawn from the sacred writings! If in reading the word of God we were to observe what expressions are suited to the several parts of prayer, and retain them in our memories, we should gain a treasure of divine sentiments and expressions fit to address our Maker upon all the occurrences of life. We should thus avoid coming to our devotions with unfurnished minds. By hiding the word of God in our hearts, and treasuring up in our minds the important truths of revelation, we shall lay in materials for prayer. Such was the advice of

the son of Sirach: "Before thou prayest prepare thyself, and be not as one that tempteth the Lord." (Eccles. xviii. 23.) "Though a man ought not," says Bishop Wilkins, "to be so confined by any premeditated form as to neglect any special infusion; he should so prepare himself as if he did expect no assistance; and he should so depend upon divine assistance, as if he had made no preparation." Though prayer is a mental exercise, for we must pray with the understanding, yet when we pray in public we must use language. Words are the signs of things; and expression is the dress of thought; and the mind of man, in combining ideas and investigating subjects, uniformly refers to those signs. In this case language is no less the instrument of mental operation, than the expression of correct sentiment. It must be allowed that the language which we employ in prayer should be plain and simple. If we use expressions that are hard to be understood, and that are above the comprehension of common minds, we may as well pray in an unknown tongue, which the apostle so justly condemns. (1 Cor. xiv. 9—14.) And though we may know ourselves what we mean, yet if we use hard words and pompous phrases, we shall perplex and confuse our fellow-worshippers, rather than instruct and profit them. "Except," saith the apostle, "ye utter

by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak unto the air." "For a plain man," says a late author, "to fill his prayer with fine words, is as unnatural as for a ploughman to cover his rustic coat with gold and silver spangles, which, instead of exciting the admiration of any, would only produce the pity and contempt of all sensible and discreet persons." Dr. Watts, in his "Guide to Prayer," mentions some in his day who used such phrases as the following:—"Thou, O Lord, art our dernier resort." "The whole world is one great machine, managed by thy puissance." "The beatific splendours of thy face irradiate the celestial region, and felicitate the saints: there are the most exuberant profusions of thy grace, and the sempiternal efflux of thy glory." "God is an abyss of light, a circle whose centre is everywhere, and his circumference nowhere." "Hell is the dark world, made up of spiritual sulphur and other ingredients, not united or harmonized, and without that pure balsamical oil that flows from the heart of God." Such swelling words of vanity may captivate and amuse silly people who admire sound more than sense; but they cannot fail to offend and disgust men of intelligent and pious minds, who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth.

But those who use Scripture language in their

prayers should be careful to use it in its proper and legitimate sense. Some pervert the language of truth, and put a false construction upon it. How often have we heard this expression, "Thou art a God nigh at hand, and not a God afar off!" Whereas the text is, "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?" That is, "I am a God afar off as well as nigh;" for the subsequent verse explains the former, "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." (Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.) Some in their prayers ask God to give them to "drink of the brook in the way;" a prophetic expression, that referred solely to the sufferings of Christ. "The wrath of God," says Henry, "running in the channel of the curse of the law, was '*the brook in the way*;' in the way of his undertaking, which he must go through with; or which run in the way of our salvation, and obstructed it; which lay between us and heaven: Christ drank of this brook when he was made a curse for us." Some, in addressing the throne of grace on behalf of their ministers, pray that they may "hear the sound of their master's feet behind them;" language which was used by the prophet Elisha, concerning a man whom he calls the "son of a murderer," who was sent to take away his head. To mention this is a suf-

ficient exposure of its impropriety. Many, in pleading with God for the conversion of the world, pray that "he may give his Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." This is asking for the accomplishment of a prophecy which has long since been fulfilled. God gave the heathen to Christ, by promise, before his incarnation. "The Scripture," saith the apostle, "foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then, they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." And the heathen was given to Christ virtually and truly when the middle wall of partition which was between Jews and Gentiles was broken down; and the Gentiles were made fellow-heirs of the same body, and those that were afar off were made nigh by the blood of Christ. We ourselves are living proofs of the accomplishment of this prophecy, since we are all heathens, in the scriptural sense of the term; as all who were not Jews were considered and denominated heathens. Some pray that God may give them "the upper springs and the nether springs;" that is, according to their interpretation, the love of God and the love of man; or else blessings for the soul and the body; a meaning foreign from

the intention of her who first employed the language, who referred merely to springs of water. Others pray "that God may cause his glorious voice to be heard, and that we may see the lighting down of his arm;" which is literally to pray for the infliction of God's judgments upon us; since the whole passage (Isai. xxx. 30) is a prophetic denouncement of God's wrath upon the nations; and hence the subsequent part of the verse says, "With the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire; with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones." Others in prayer make unnecessary additions to the words of Scripture; such as, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy *reconciled* countenance upon us;" as if the word *reconciled* were necessary to complete the sense. And, "Lord, give us the spirit of prayer, and the grace of supplication;" whereas the spirit of prayer is also the spirit of supplication. Some take liberties with the Lord's prayer, and say, "Deliver us from *all* evil, and *leave* us not in temptation." And the writer of this article once heard a very popular preacher pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, *and help us to forgive those who* trespass against us." Such improprieties should be carefully guarded against.

Thirdly. That public prayer-meetings may be universally profitable, care should be taken

to avoid long and wearisome prayers. People in common life, who are generally the persons that take the lead in prayer-meetings, cannot pray long without repetition; if not in using the same words, yet in adopting similar sentiments. He who prays fervently, and who puts his whole soul into his prayers, cannot pray long without exhausting his strength, and thereby seriously injuring his health; and long prosing prayers will lull people to sleep, rather than enkindle in them the flame of devotion. "Some persons, in spite of all remonstrances, have no more notion of accommodating themselves to their brethren, or to the time allotted them, than young children. The reason they pray so long is not owing to their extraordinary liberty: this is obvious to all present; for after rambling a minute or two, they come back to their former views, and so on repeatedly; using nearly the same expressions, and indeed very frequently these repetitions are entirely verbatim. The patience of the people may hold out; but they are merely saved by hope, as the person praying makes a dozen periods before he really comes to a conclusion." If the persons appointed to engage in prayer are so few as to be incapable of occupying the whole of the time allotted for the continuance of the meeting, it would be much more profitable for them to pray twice,

than to continue double the time on their knees at once, to the great inconvenience and discomfort of the worshippers. "Long prayers," says Dr. Clarke, "prevent kneeling; for it is utterly impossible for men or women to keep on their knees during the time such last: where these prevail, the people either stand or sit. At a public meeting a pious brother went to prayer; I kneeled on the floor, having nothing to lean against or to support me; he prayed forty-eight minutes. I was unwilling to rise, and several times was nigh fainting. What I suffered I cannot describe. After the meeting was over I ventured to expostulate with the good man; and in addition to the injury I sustained by his unmerciful prayer, I had the following reproof: 'My brother, if your mind had been more spiritual, you would not have felt the prayer too long.' More than twenty years have elapsed since this transaction took place; but the remembrance of what I then suffered still rests on my mind with a keen edge." One of the standing rules of Methodism, recorded by Mr. Wesley, which every itinerant preacher is bound to observe, is, "Do not usually pray above eight or ten minutes, at most, without intermission."

Fourthly. Those who take the lead, and officiate in prayer-meetings, should study a little variety in their thoughts and expressions.

The circumstances and wants of men are greatly diversified. It is very doubtful whether any two persons in a congregation are in their moral condition precisely similar. But the blessings which God has to bestow are as numerous and as various as the necessities of man. What David said concerning God's thoughts we may say concerning his gifts: "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand!" And if God has such a rich variety of blessings to bestow, why should not our prayers bear some proportion to their nature and extent? If the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened in offering such glorious privileges to our acceptance, why should we be straitened in asking for the realization of them, and using such a variety of appropriate language and expressions, that our prayers may have something new and interesting in them? Some persons have a collection of pet phrases and favourite expressions, which they use on all occasions; and they ask for the same blessings in the same set of words: this makes the worship dull and formal. It frequently happens that the first person who engages in prayer embraces an extensive range of subjects: he prays not only for those who are present, but for the ministers of God's word; for the different

sections of the Christian church; for the prosperity of our own country; for the spread of the Gospel, and the conversion of the world. Of course it is not necessary for the next person that prays to pursue the same track; much less for three or four to do it in succession. The expediency of it might be questioned, even if they were all capable of varying their expressions; but they often pray not only for the same things, but follow one another almost word for word.

There is another evil in close connexion with this, that should be avoided; and that is, the employing the same persons from week to week in conducting the worship. In some cases this is unavoidable, where the work is in its infancy, and few can be found capable of exercising in public prayer-meetings; but in our large towns, and where the members of the Christian church are numerous, there many may be selected who can pray profitably; but perhaps they are modest in their dispositions, and diffident and retiring in their habits, and they shrink from observation rather than court it. But these should be pressed into the service; and as God has entrusted them with the gift of prayer, they should use it for his glory, and the advantage of his people. In almost every Christian society officious persons will be found who, like Dio-

trophes of old, love to have the pre-eminence. Perhaps they are seniors, and have been accustomed for years to be the first and foremost in these social and devotional exercises; and they cling to their office with the greatest tenacity. Instead of rejoicing in the fact that God is raising up young men, and qualifying them to be their coadjutors in the walks of usefulness, they regard them as rivals, rather than as fellow-helpers to the truth; and would rather see them bury their talents, than employ them in the service of the sanctuary. But while we honour those to whom honour is due, those who have borne the burden and heat of the day, we should be careful to encourage those who will occupy public situations in the church when the tongues of their seniors are silent in death, and they have exchanged mortality for life, and passed from the church militant upon earth to the church triumphant in heaven.

Fifthly. Those who are appointed to officiate in public prayer-meetings should not only be studious in selecting matter for their prayers, but they should also be careful to guard against everything that is unseemly and offensive in their manner of praying. It is to be feared that this subject does not obtain all that serious attention that it deserves. Among all the exercises upon earth in which a human being can

possibly engage, that of speaking unto God on behalf of his fellow-sinners is the most solemnly important. Whether he considers the Being whom he addresses, the character and circumstances of those for whom he pleads with Him, or the blessings he solicits at his hands, he cannot fail to be impressed with the serious responsibility of the work in which he is engaged. Everything, therefore, in his manner that tends in any degree to create disgust, or excite prejudice, in the minds of his fellow-worshippers should be carefully avoided. The management of the voice demands some attention. God trieth the hearts, but the ear trieth words. "Should the matter, method, and expressions be ever so well chosen in prayer, yet it is possible for the voice to spoil the pleasure, and injure the devotion, of our fellow-worshippers." In human voices there is an immense variety: this is one proof among a thousand others of our Creator's skill. It is questionable whether the voices of any two individuals who were ever born into the world were precisely similar in their intonations. Every man has his own voice, that which is natural to him, and which he employs in his common conversation with men; and no reason can be assigned why he should affect to alter it when he speaks in his devotions unto God. Some persons appear to have two voices; one for the shop, and another for the sanctuary; one by

which they address men, and another by which they speak unto God; and their voice at different times is so dissimilar, that we should scarcely know that they were the same persons, unless we had some other evidence of their identity. "The great and general rule," says Dr. Watts, "I would lay down for managing the voice in prayer is this: Let us use the same voice with which we usually speak in grave and serious conversation, especially upon pathetical and affecting subjects." Some have cheerful voices in common conversation, but in prayer their tones and intonations are grave, solemn, and sepulchral; which gives an occasion to our enemies to ridicule our worship, and pronounce it canting, whining hypocrisy. Others in prayer affect to speak fine, and mince or clip their words, and employ pretty lady-like phrases, or scraps of poetry, perhaps from Shakspeare, to speak unto the Lord. The ancient Pharisees thought they should be heard for their *much* speaking; but these act as if they thought they should be heard for their *fine* speaking. But if ever divine simplicity merits attention, it most assuredly does in our devotions. The language of a Christian in prayer is the clothing of his thoughts; it is the dress of his mind; and it should be composed like the dress of his body, decent and neat, but not pompous or gaudy,—simple and plain, but not careless or unseemly.

In the management of the voice in prayer, care should be taken that every sentence be spoken loud enough to be heard; yet not so loud as to affright or offend the ear. Between these two extremes there is a great variety of degrees in sound, sufficient to answer all the changes in our affections, and the different sense of every part of prayer. In the beginning of prayer, especially, a lower voice is more becoming, both as it bespeaks humility and reverence when we enter into the presence of God, and as it is also a great conveniency to the organs of speech not to arise too high at first; for it is much more difficult to sink again afterwards, than to rise to higher accents if need required. Some persons have acquired a habit of beginning their prayers so loud as to startle the company: others begin so low, even in a large assembly, that it looks like secret worship, and as though they prohibited those that are present to unite with them; for several sentences at the commencement of their prayers, they cannot be heard by one tenth of the persons present. Some pray at the very top of their voices, in a tone so elevated, and in a manner so vehement, that when they come to repeat the Lord's prayer they are necessitated to pitch their voices in a lower key; and thus that divinely-instituted form of prayer is irreverently, and with a schoolboy's haste, hurried over. Others who

are accustomed to pray in public, habituate themselves to the use of feeble and threadbare expletives; such as, "Grant, we beseech thee;" or, "Be graciously pleased;" or, "Let it please thee to hear us." For however proper or necessary it may be to use such expressions occasionally in prayer, yet when they are repeated at the commencement of almost every sentence, they offend the ear, and interrupt the devotion of the assembly. And not unfrequently the name of the Supreme Being is introduced unnecessarily in our prayers. Some, by allowing their tongues to run faster than their thoughts, begin sentences without knowing how to conclude them; and hence, after much hesitancy, they start off and seize on another sentence that has no affinity or connexion with the former. Others, to use a common phrase, pray *at* people in their prayers; and are so personal in their allusions, that few can misunderstand them. But if we desire to administer reproof to any of our fellow-creatures, there is a more excellent and a more scriptural way of doing it: let us go and tell them their faults between themselves and ourselves alone, and not make them the subjects of reprehension in our prayers. It sometimes happens that persons of the lower ranks of society give out hymns in the public congregation which they are unable to read correctly; and hence they make such egregious

blunders as a Sunday-school scholar might correct. The writer of this article once heard a pious brother of this description, who, instead of reading, "Source of the old prophetic fire," read, "Scour off the old prophetic fire." This shows the necessity of appointing such persons to superintend prayer-meetings as are capable of conducting them with propriety.

Sixthly. Those who speak unto God in our public prayer-meetings, on behalf of the people, should be careful not to allow any apparent zeal, or fervency of manner, or elevation of voice, to become a substitute for the spirit of prayer; for that intense aspiration of the heart after God which can alone render prayer acceptable in his sight. On this subject much circumspection is necessary. We are in great danger of confounding animal excitement with spiritual enjoyment. "When, from some external cause, the heart is glad, the spirits are light, the thoughts ready, the tongue voluble, a kind of spontaneous eloquence is the result; with this we are pleased, and this ready flow we are willing to impose upon ourselves for piety." But there may be much apparent fervour of mind, and fluency of speech, in our public prayers, with little of that inward devotion of the heart, which is in the sight of God of great price. We have not unfrequently heard persons in our social meetings, and even in our pulpits,

offer up their supplications unto God with great propriety of language, and vehemency of utterance, but no sympathy is excited in the minds of the worshippers, no flame of devotion is enkindled in their hearts, and no responses are heard from their lips; all is silent as death, and as cold as the grave: while others, with languid frames, and enfeebled voices, with little show of zeal, but much of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, have had such power with God in prayer, that a glow of heavenly feeling has pervaded the assembly, and all have been ready to acknowledge that God was with them of a truth. Let us never forget, therefore, in our approaches unto God, that a preparation of heart is necessary to render our worship acceptable to him, and profitable to ourselves. There must be a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, an intense desire for the enjoyment of God, a following hard after him; and while we are praying for others, we must feel for them, sympathize with them, and long after them in the bowels of Jesus Christ; and in the spirit of supplication intercede with God for their salvation. Let us remember, also, that the Spirit of God has no substitute; that nothing can supply the lack of his presence; that it is not by might or power on our part, that our prayers are prevalent with God; but by the agency of that Spirit who maketh intercession

according to the will of God. In our prayers, therefore, we should expect the presence of the Holy Ghost to cheer us, and his power to aid us in our devotions. And let us plead with him for the accomplishment of those promises upon which he has caused us to hope.

Seventhly. On the attitude or posture of body most suitable to the exercise of prayer, it may not be deemed superfluous or unnecessary to offer a few thoughts. There is no time unseasonable, nor place unsuitable, nor attitude improper, for ejaculatory prayer. We may breathe out our desires after God while lying on our beds, or sitting at our tables, or working at our business, or walking in the streets. And these solemn but silent aspirations of soul, and devout wishes of the heart, will find acceptance with Him whose throne is in heaven, but whose eyes behold, and whose eyelids try, the children of men. But when we worship God in public, and especially in social prayer, some regard must be paid to the posture of body, while the mind is engaged with God. "I suppose," says Dr. Clarke, "the grossly absurd, and perfectly ungodly, custom of sitting during prayer is out of the question. It was so perfectly unlike every thing that was becoming in divine worship, and so expressive of a total want of reverence in the worshipper, and of that consciousness of his wants and deep sense of his own worthlessness

which he ought to have, that the church of God never tolerated it; a custom that even Heathenism itself had too much light either to practise or sanction."

It was an observation made by Frederic III. that the forms used by the Catholics in divine service made their worship seem to have a superior for its object; and those of the Protestants to have an equal. Were that prince now living, and were he to visit some of our churches and chapels in this nation, might he not say, that the posture of worship in which many place themselves is such as indicates the object of their addresses to be neither a superior nor equal? Their prayers are offered neither in prostration, like the Mahometans; nor standing, like the Jews; nor kneeling, as Christians; but **SITTING!** an attitude in which a superior receives and addresses an inferior. This is a custom which has been introduced, partly through the example of those who ought to have set a better; and partly, it is to be feared, from that species of indifference which arises from ignorance and carelessness: for did people think where and before whom they are; did they properly reflect on the nature of prayer; did they contemplate **GOD** as the **CREATOR** of heaven and earth, as the universal **SOVEREIGN**, with whom is honour, power, dominion, majesty, and glory;—I say, did men consider these things, can we suppose they

would dare to address JEHOVAH in an attitude which is at the utmost distance from reverence and humility?

EUSEBIUS one day perceiving that his wife, like others, began to give up kneeling at her prayers, and anxious to give her a proper sense of her conduct, called up her maid, and desired her to go into the room where her mistress was, to seat herself down on the sofa, and to ask her for a new gown. The lady was quite in a rage. Eusebius desired the maid to retire; and, addressing his wife, drew a parallel of her own conduct with what she had resented so highly; and she was so fully convinced, that she promised to behave with more propriety at church in future.

Some indulgence must be claimed, and allowance made, on behalf of aged, weak, and afflicted people, who, with much bodily pain, and trembling steps, come to the place where prayer is wont to be made; but whose infirmities render them unable to assume any posture in the public worship except that of sitting. But persons in the full vigour of health should studiously and conscientiously guard against any attitude of body that betokens self-indulgence, or indolent listlessness, while engaged in the solemn act of prayer. Standing is a posture that has been sanctioned by antiquity. Abraham "stood before the Lord." Jehoshaphat "stood in the house of

the Lord," and prayed; and "all Judah stood before the Lord, and their little ones, their wives, and their children." Our Saviour said, "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any." And the publican stood afar off while he prayed. But while standing to pray may be tolerated, it is far more commendable, and more consonant with the practice of the pious in all ages, to kneel to pray. It must be allowed, that no attitude of body can be more indicative of genuine humility and devout reverence of mind than that of kneeling. Hence, Solomon in praying, "kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven." Ezra says, "I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God." Daniel "kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed." Jesus "kneeled down, and prayed." Stephen in praying for his murderers, "kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Peter, when he raised Tabitha from the dead, "kneeled down, and prayed." St. Paul, in taking leave of the Ephesian elders, "kneeled down, and prayed with them all." And departing from Tyre, he says, "We kneeled down on the shore, and prayed." And on another occasion he says, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

It is matter of regret that the pews in many of our modern places of worship are so constructed as scarcely to admit of kneeling; and especially during such long prayers as we are not unfrequently accustomed to hear. But where kneeling is impracticable, let us imitate the heavenly inhabitants, who "stand in the presence of God," and "do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word."

Eighthly. There is another thing that should be carefully guarded against in reference to public prayer-meetings; and that is, the continuance of them unto unseasonable hours. It must be allowed, that no absolute and invariable rule can be laid down as to the length of time to which these meetings can with propriety be extended. There are seasons of peculiar visitation and refreshing from the presence of the Lord. There may be much of the unction of the Holy One realized by the assembly. Penitent sinners may be fervently agonizing with God for the pardon of sins; and believers be earnestly seeking for purity of heart; and the power of God may be present to heal. And cases have occurred in which large congregations have been so deeply affected, and earnestly engaged in prayer, that all persuasion to induce them to retire, and go home to their several

dwelling, has been utterly unavailing. Like Jacob of old, they have wrestled "till the break of day." But such occasions are rarely realized. Generally our prayer-meetings do not begin until eight o'clock; many of those who attend are labourers and mechanics, who are wearied by the exercises of the day; others are servants, whose presence will be needed at home; and some are heads of families, who have domestic duties to perform, which are no less important than those imposed upon them by the church. Family prayer must be maintained; and when the husband, or master, is absent until a very late hour, this will be omitted, or hurried over, perhaps when the junior branches of the family have retired to rest, or are so overcome with sleep that they can take no interest in the devotions of the night. "Late evening visits," says Job Orton, "whether to our friends or public places, are mischievous, both to personal and family order and godliness. In this case, children are gone to bed, servants fatigued, and all fitter for sleep than prayer. If you are obliged, or think it right, to spend the evening abroad, let family worship be performed before you go out. This is almost the only time when men of business can taste the sweets of domestic life, enjoy the company of their families, and teach them wisdom and piety; therefore their evenings should not be always nor often spent abroad."

Ninthly. That meetings for prayer may be more extensively and generally useful, all prudential means should be used to increase the number of their attendants. It is a lamentable fact, that these meetings are thought lightly of by many professors of Christianity. How thinly are they attended! Some, from whom better things might be expected, as an excuse for their omission of duty, say, with an air of indifference, "O, 'tis only a prayer-meeting!" If some popular and favourite preacher be expected, or a public Sunday-school meeting be advertised for, what crowds of people are drawn together! scarcely will the chapel contain the congregation. But when the most solemn and deeply devotional duty in which man can possibly engage, is to be performed; when the Deity is to be invoked, his name worshipped, and his favour sought on behalf of ourselves, and the whole family of man, then perhaps a dozen or twenty persons only can be found in the house of prayer. Nothing can be more indicative of the low and superficial state of the religious experience of any people, than the indifference and inattention which they pay to meetings appointed for social prayer. If a revival of the work of God takes place in any department or section of the church, it usually begins in the prayer-meetings; and Christian ministers especially should labour to excite in the minds of

their congregations an additional degree of interest on behalf of those meetings. This may be done both by exhortation and example. They may embrace opportunities of preaching on the subject of social prayer, explaining its scriptural character, its long-established practice, and its great utility; and affectionately entreating their hearers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, but to meet in the name of Christ, for the purpose of mutual prayer and devout supplication. And to their affectionate entreaty they should add example. Let them sanction these meetings by their presence: this will serve to prevent improper persons from officiating in these meetings, and check any irregularities that might otherwise be introduced into them. And when ministers attend and conduct these social meetings, their hearers, whom they cordially invite, will be induced to follow their example; and thus the number of devout worshippers will be considerably augmented, and the increase of the congregations can scarcely fail to awaken additional zeal, and inspire with unwonted ardour the minds of those who are accustomed to engage in these devotional exercises.

But while ministers do their utmost to increase the number of attendants at prayer-meetings, the people should co-operate in this laudable undertaking. If they have a great sense

of the importance of eternal things, and a concern for the precious souls of men, they need not regret that they are not preachers; they may go, in their earnestness, and agonies of soul, and pour out their hearts before Him who can supply all their need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. "There is no way," says President Edwards, "that Christians in a private capacity can do so much to promote the work of God, and advance the kingdom of Christ, as by prayer. By this even women, children, and servants may have a public influence. Let persons in other respects be ever so weak, and ever so mean, and under ever so poor advantages to do much for Christ and the souls of men; yet if they have much of the spirit of grace and supplication, in this way they may have power with Him who is infinite in power, and has the government of the whole world. A poor man in his cottage may have a blessed influence all over the world. God is, if I may so say, at the command of the prayer of faith; and in this respect is, as it were, under the power of his people: *as princes, they have power with God, and prevail.* Though they may be private persons, their prayers are put up in the name of a Mediator who is a public person, being the Head of the whole church;" and to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth.

In conclusion, let us as Christian professors

prize our privileges, and especially the privilege of praying; of holding intercourse with God, and having fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the eternal Spirit. God does not need our prayers; they cannot augment his happiness; our goodness does not extend to him. But we pray for our own sake, and for the sake of others. And we have confidence in God that he will hear our prayers, because he hath promised to do it. Then let us bless the Lord for power to pray, for hearts to pray, and for encouragement to pray; and let this duty be our delight. Let our love to it increase and abound more and more; and let us pray without ceasing, for it is the practice of prayer that can alone render prayer pleasing. Whether, therefore, we have joy or grief, ease or pain, prosperity or adversity, honour or dishonour, let us give ourselves to prayer; for prayer is the first of all duties, the obligation of all conditions, the safety of all stations, the solace of all sorrows, and the refuge in all dangers. Let us, then, individually pray, with the Psalmist, "May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer."

